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Devotion to God and State: The Book in the Education of the
Virgin and Vigée-Lebrun's *Marie-Antoinette en Robe de Velours Bleu*

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DEVOTION TO GOD AND STATE: THE BOOK IN THE EDUCATION OF THE
VIRGIN AND VIGÉE-LEBRUN'S *MARIE-ANTOINETTE EN ROBE DE VELOURS
BLEU*

by

Elaine M. Slayton

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Major: Art History

The University of Memphis

May 2010

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To my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the only King
who treats his subjects with perfect love and grace.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank my fiancé Tim, who has day after day loved and supported me and convinced me that no dream is unattainable. I would also like to express my gratitude to my parents, who have unwaveringly supported me emotionally, spiritually and financially, and who raised me to love God and to know that hard work really does pay off. In addition, I want to thank my sister and brother-in-law, April and Jeff, for being positive influences in my life.

I want to acknowledge my major professor, Dr. William McKeown, who took time out of his sabbatical to advise me on my thesis. His seemingly boundless knowledge of eighteenth-century Europe, insightful comments, and discerning editing eye have been invaluable to the development of my thesis and helped to shape my arguments. My other thesis committee members, Drs. Fred Albertson and Todd Richardson, have also been incredibly helpful during my graduate school experience, kindly providing their expertise whenever I have requested it. I am grateful to Drs. Carol Crown and Richardson for getting me involved with the Southeastern College Art Conference, at which I had the privilege of presenting the paper that is the foundation for this thesis. Furthermore, I want to thank my undergraduate advisor and mentor, Dr. Terrell Tebbetts, for teaching me how to write to the best of my ability, and my first art history professor, Dr. Robert Torchia, who sparked my interest in the field.

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ABSTRACT

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In this thesis, I will investigate the iconographic significance of Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun's *Marie-Antoinette en Velours Bleu* by analyzing Education of the Virgin scenes and other contemporary eighteenth-century portraits of women reading. I will begin with an in-depth look at largely Spanish Education of the Virgin scenes and establish the Virgin Mary with her book as both the subject of God's patriarchal authority and a source of influence for subsequent allegorical portraits. I will then analyze a small group of eighteenth-century portraits of women with books, also establishing them well within the boundaries of the gendered norms—men as worldly and cultured, women as private and domestic. Finally, I will discuss the *Velours Bleu* portrait as a case study within a genre of portraiture that depicts women reading. In light of its Marian imagery, the portrait emerges as a visual testimony to Marie-Antoinette's submission and obedience to her king-husband, Louis XVI.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis, “Devotion to God and State: The Book in the Education of the Virgin and Vigée-Lebrun’s *Marie-Antoinette en Robe de Velours Bleu*,” sprang from a shorter paper I wrote for a Methods and Practicum graduate course, “Structuring an Identity: The Book in *Marie-Antoinette en Robe de Velours Bleu*.” In the paper, I argued that though the book as an attribute had traditionally symbolized the worldliness and breadwinning character of male sitters, the book in Elisabeth-Louise Vigée-Lebrun’s 1788 portrait of Marie-Antoinette represents a seemingly new eighteenth-century tradition of women’s portraiture that suggests their domestic roles and subsequent devotion to their husbands. Under the guidance of my professors Drs. William McKeown and Todd Richardson, however, I was exposed to the earlier tradition of the Education of the Virgin, which in its various forms consistently depicts a young woman holding or reading a book as well. Interestingly, the Education of the Virgin, a scene that undoubtedly functions as the visual ancestor to the Vigée-Lebrun portrait, has not been connected to subsequent portraits of women reading, a gap in current scholarship that I intend to fill. By way of a feminist perspective on seventeenth-century Education of the Virgin scenes, I aim to shed light on a recurring phenomenon of eighteenth-century portraiture, namely the book as a female sitter’s attribute, and more specifically the significance of the book and other iconographical elements in Vigée-Lebrun’s *Marie-Antoinette en Robe de Velours Bleu*, which render the portrait as an allegory of the Virgin Mary. Both the book as a woman’s attribute and the *Velours Bleu* portrait have been largely overlooked by modern scholars. By linking the Education of the Virgin expressly to Vigée-Lebrun’s 1788 portrait of the French queen, I hope to contribute to the larger

body of scholarship on eighteenth-century art and gender studies.

Literature Review

Three main authors share equally predominant roles in the uncovering of the gendered implications in the Education of the Virgin—Calderón Benjumea, Pamela Sheingorn, and Mindy Taggard. Their research has been invaluable to my first chapter. Benjumea's scholarship is the keystone to viewing the Education scene as a playing field for gender discourses. His pioneering book *Iconografía de Santa Ana en Sevilla y Triana* (1990) views Spanish variations of the Education as propaganda for male literacy, more specifically, the all-male members of contemporary literary academies. Certainly, his argument is well-founded, as the literary practices of women of the Baroque era were closely watched by men who discouraged woman's reading of secular literature and promoted instead her "natural" affinity for the domestic milieu. However, as Sheingorn has pointed out, Benjumea's argument is incomplete in that it altogether overlooks the woman factor. In her 1993 article, "The Wise Mother: The Image of St. Anne Teaching the Virgin Mary," Sheingorn argues that the Education must have attracted female rather than male viewers. She explains that the teacher/pupil relationship between St. Anne and Mary in the Education tradition was a reality for lay mothers and daughters of the time, so the image must have taken on an especially didactic nature for the "fairer" sex. In 1999, Mindy Taggard wrote "Murillo's St. Anne Teaching the Virgin to Read and the Question of Female Literacy and Learning in Golden Age Spain," deflating the arguments of both Benjumea and Sheingorn altogether. Taggard points out that where Benjumea completely neglects the Education's aspects of domestic life (i.e., the stifling nature of the interior space, the sweetness of the mother-and-child interaction, and the

frequently depicted sewing basket), Sheingorn likewise neglects the negative impact the scene may have had on women, and fails to acknowledge the absurdity of the holy Virgin Mary as a practical role model for the so-called depraved women of the seventeenth century, in particular. Taggard's solution is that the Education scene appeals to both men and women, their authoritative and submissive roles in society, respectively. As conclusive as Taggard's argument appears, nevertheless, it fails to examine the scene's influence on the later employment of books in French portraits of women. Furthermore, Taggard, Benjumea, and Sheingorn all exclude French versions of the Education from their research, leaving me to heavily rely on their interpretations of Spanish Education scenes to shed light on their lesser known counterparts.

On the general subject of books in eighteenth-century portraits of women, the scholarship is not quite as extensive as that which we see on the Education of the Virgin. The bibliography I compiled for Chapter Two is a veritable patchwork of literature spanning a wide range of disciplines, from the issue of female education, to feminist and gender studies and the function of allegory in visual culture. Concerning female education, Geraldine Hodgson's comprehensive volume *Studies in French Education from Rabelais to Rousseau* published in 1969 should be credited for its thorough interpretation of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile*, or *On Education* from an expressly feminist perspective. Hodgson deconstructs Rousseau's argument that girls, deficient in deep mental concentration and therefore more content to tend to their dolls, are ill-equipped to receive the same education as boys, and poses him as a misogynist, and an oppressor of the advancement of woman. Regarding feminist interpretations of art, Norma Broude and Mary Gerrard's 1992 compilation of feminist essays, *The Expanding*

Discourse: Feminism and Art History, is an introduction to viewing art from a feminist standpoint, as it covers over six centuries of woman's oppression as depicted in art. Patricia Simon's article, "Women in Frames: The Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture," in the volume is significant in its discussion of the influence of the male gaze on portraits of women. *Women, Art, and the Politics of Identity in Eighteenth-century Europe* edited by Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam is a similar volume that views specifically art of the eighteenth century from a discerning, feminist eye. The recurring issue of the essays in the book is the means by which Enlightenment Age women constructed their identities in portraiture, in particular, how they portrayed themselves in a way that was or was not acceptable in man's sight. Of course, Mary Sheriff must also be mentioned for her seminal scholarship in feminist studies in art history in general, and on the artist Vigée-Lebrun. Although in her insightful book, *The Exceptional Woman: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and the Cultural Politics of Art* (1996), she focuses chiefly on the artistic environment and practices of Vigée-Lebrun, Sheriff reveals much about the overall cultural attitude of men towards women during the eighteenth century, primarily through the plight of women painters working for predominantly male patrons.

More specifically relevant to this thesis, Mary Sheriff's article, "The Naked Truth? The Allegorical Frontispiece and Woman's Ambition in Eighteenth-century France," explores women's employment of allegory in portraiture as a means of asserting herself in society without appearing unruly. Similarly, Kathleen Nicholson's "The Ideology of Feminine 'Virtue': The Vestal Virgin in French Eighteenth-century Allegorical Portraiture" culminates with an in-depth look at François-Hubert Drouais's

Madame de Pompadour as a Vestal Virgin. Nicholson suggests that the portrait of King Louis XV's mistress as a chaste vestal was commissioned to emphasize her internal, rather than external, charms of intellect and virtue and to counteract her tattered public image. On the specific topic of the book convention in portraiture, Kate Retford's recent study on pendant portraits by British painters has helped to establish female sitters with books as visual embodiments of woman's private, domestic life, as juxtaposed with her husband's very public life. In her 2006 book, *Art of Domestic Life: Family Portraiture in Eighteenth-century England*, Retford presents several sets of pendant portraits of well-to-do couples, in which, time and again, the woman is presented seated within an interior space, while the husband is standing, often times in front of a landscape background. Linda Docherty's earlier article, "Women as Readers: Visual Interpretations," a study on companion portraits by American painters, is also noteworthy. Docherty points out that male sitters are often much more engaged with the books they hold than their female counterparts.

Little to no interpretive scholarship exists on Vigée-Lebrun's *Marie-Antoinette en Robe de Velours Bleu* or its appropriation of Marian allegory, so Chapter Three depends greatly on both contemporaneous sources and modern biographies of Marie-Antoinette and, of course, on the domestic nature of portraits of women with books as established in Chapter Two. The only definitive source on *Marie-Antoinette en Robe de Velours Bleu* is Joseph Baillio's catalogue for the exhibition, *Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun: 1755-1842*, at the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth in 1982. Baillio provides a fairly complete provenance of the portrait and a detailed visual analysis, but does not venture to place it within any particularly feminist dialogue, nor within an allegorical category, as

he does with *Marie-Antoinette and Her Children*. The works of Antonia Fraser and Caroline Weber have been vital to my understanding of Marie-Antoinette's life and the oppressive environment in which she continuously lived, from birth to death. Fraser's *Marie-Antoinette: The Journey* is an intimate look into Marie-Antoinette's upbringing, her function as the glue between the Austrian Empire and the French monarchy, and the cut-throat world of Versailles. Weber's similarly biographical *Queen of Fashion: What Marie-Antoinette Wore to the Revolution* discusses how Marie-Antoinette used fashion as an external front to protect herself from the pressures of the monarchy, but in the end, fashion, or her indulgence in material possessions, helped send her to the guillotine.

Methodology

I have written "Devotion to God and State: The Education of the Virgin and Vigée-Lebrun's *Marie-Antoinette en Robe de Velours Bleu*" from a decidedly feminist perspective, as established in art history first by Linda Nochlin. With the 1971 publication of her essay, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" Nochlin instituted the feminist methodology for approaching art history that is still in practice today. She posits that women artists of the past will never be considered "great" in the sense of male artists not because of "our stars, our hormones, our menstrual cycles, or our empty internal spaces," but because of our external circumstances, "our institutions and our education—education understood to include everything that happens to us from the moment we enter this world of meaningful symbols, signs, and signals."¹ Nochlin argues that women are viewed by society as inferior to men for reasons completely out of their control—that men ultimately dominate society's institutions and education, and women

¹ Linda Nochlin, "Why Are There No Great Women Artists?" in *Women, Art and Power and Other Essays*, ed. Linda Nochlin (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 147-158.

can participate only inasmuch as those institutions (albeit established by men) will allow them. Her argument immediately works to explain why ultimately the educations of the Virgin, lay women, and specifically Marie-Antoinette were less than mediocre in comparison to those of their male counterparts—because in all three circumstances, education was controlled by men who made sure women did not surpass the intellectual norms of their own. By interpreting the Education of the Virgin scenes and Vigée-Lebrun's *Marie-Antoinette en Robe de Velours Bleu* under this assumption, I intend to contribute to the discourse began by Nochlin and which is still reverberating today. I will present Vigée-Lebrun as an artist working within the established systems of education to create a portrait that conceded to the gendered stereotypes and cultural expectations of eighteenth-century France.

CHAPTER ONE

THE EDUCATION OF THE VIRGIN: FROM MEDIEVAL ICON TO EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ALLEGORICAL PORTRAIT AND ‘GENDERED KNOWLEDGE’

Mary did not have perfect wisdom (which belongs only to God), rather, God infused her with all the theology she ever would need to fulfill perfectly at all times her preordained role of mother of the Redeemer, Jesus Christ...At the instant of her miraculous conception, she had received a perfect knowledge of supernatural science as theological knowledge of the mysteries of the faith, especially the Trinity and the Incarnation, along with the wisdom and understanding that is a principal help for this intelligence.¹

The image of an individual in the process of reading, or looking up after having just finished reading, has been in the background of gender identity discourse for many centuries. Eighteenth-century French portraits of women are brimming with such imagery, but are seemingly without a valid cause, considering that the convention of an individual reading has long been associated with portraits of aristocratic and educated men. During a time when the boundaries between masculinity and femininity were becoming “blurred,” the significance of the book in portraits could easily get lost amidst the ambiguity, especially for modern-day art historians.² Therefore, a logical question arises when a typically masculine portrait convention is applied to a female sitter also in a secular setting. A prime example is found in the *oeuvre* of Elisabeth Louise Vigée-Lebrun: her 1788 *Marie Antoinette en Robe de Velours Bleu* (Fig. 1). In her portrayal of the French queen, the artist situates a book in the hands of her infamous sitter, and subsequently created for Marie-Antoinette a unique identity—an identity that almost certainly has been misconstrued by its contemporary and modern-day viewers alike. To

1. Mindy Taggard, “Murillo’s *St. Anne Teaching the Virgin to Read* and the Question of Female Literacy and Learning in Golden Age Spain,” *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift/Journal of Art History* 68, no. 1 (1999): 34-35; Here, Taggard has paraphrased the words of late sixteenth to early seventeenth-century Spanish Jesuit Francisco Suarez.

2. Andrea Pearson, *Women and Portraits in Early Modern Europe: Gender, Agency, Identity* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2008), 167.

best understand the inclusion of books in eighteenth-century portraits of women, specifically Vigée-Lebrun's 1788 portrait of Marie-Antoinette, I want to first examine what I believe to be the early precedent for such imagery—the Education of the Virgin scene. Originating in the fourteenth century, the scene, one of the first to allude to a female's education, depicts Saint Anne teaching her daughter the Virgin Mary to read. What my research reveals is that, like many other education scenes, the Education scene is a visual allegory for God's patriarchal authority and Mary's subservience to Him, a theme appropriated by eighteenth-century artists to convey men's patriarchal authority and, likewise, their wives' subservience to them. In this chapter I will argue that what some scholars suggest is a visual promotion of female literacy in Education scenes, instead is a promotion of male authority.

If presented with a typical image of the Education of the Virgin an uninformed viewer would see merely a tender moment between a mother and her daughter, the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next. If we look closely at, for example, Bartolomé Esteban Murillo's *St. Anne Teaching the Virgin to Read* (Fig. 7) we see an endearing scene of a woman and her daughter looking intently at one another. The woman, seated upon a wooden stool with a tassled red and yellow cushion, wears heavily draped clothes—a cream-colored headwrap that almost completely covers her dark hair, a gray, long-sleeved undergarment, a reddish-orange overdress trimmed in dark blue around the sleeve, and a golden yellow ribbon of fabric swathes the woman's hips and left shoulder. The young girl, kneeling before her mother, wears similarly draped garments—a pinkish-red dress, adorned with a bow at the neck and weighted with mounds of fabric in the back, and a royal blue sash lain across her left arm. Her long,

brown hair is decorated with a pink flower. The two are set within a rather sterile environment of classical architecture, a concrete, engaged column behind the woman's right shoulder, and the semblance of a concrete railing just behind the girl's left side. A wicker basket, complete with a sewing cushion and swaddling fabric, edges its way into the bottom left corner of the painting, and in the top right corner two putti-like angels clad in pink fabric descend from the cloudy, gray heavens to place a flowered crown upon the girl's head. The heavenly realm is also reflected in the inconspicuous halo around the woman's head. Near to the very center of the painting is a book, held by both the woman and girl, from which the woman appears to instruct, and to which the girl points, a glance of common understanding exchanged between the two figures.

Though it would be easy for one to assume that the figures of St. Anne and the Virgin represent the literal holy twosome of the mother and grandmother of Jesus Christ, free from metaphor or symbolic interpretation, many questions arise from the composition of Murillo's painting (and other Education scenes). What book do the two figures hold? What is the significance of the sewing basket? What does the Education say about the culture in which it was created? Like many examples of Christian liturgical art, the Education of the Virgin scene is complicated by its historical and political contexts, and presents a conundrum ripe for debate amongst art historians and Mariologists alike. The same scholars have found that, when coupled with a book, the holy twosome take on the function of the vessel by which God's sovereign design trickles down from the celestial realm to humanity. In her article on the Virgin Mary as intercessor, Sandra Zimdars-Swartz reveals that, even today, Catholic doctrine recognizes Mary as significant in large part for her role as the mother of the Messiah, "a special role

in the drama of salvation and that is the basis for the special privileges she is accorded: Mary is ‘preredeemed’ in her Immaculate Conception so that she is never touched by the guilt of original sin.”³ As seen in the introductory quote, the thoughts of Francisco Suarez supplement Zimdars-Swartz’s argument in their disclosure that divine knowledge is integral to the Virgin’s fulfillment of her “special role.” But whether the Virgin Mary functioned as a dutiful follower in God’s design is not the question; how the Education of the Virgin served to communicate rigid ideas about gendered stereotypes and women’s access to education in a patriarchal society is.

The pictorial theme of the Education of the Virgin has been most fully investigated by three scholars, each one more enlightening than the next to my argument. Despite the ground they have covered, however, they consider neither how the Education of the Virgin influenced subsequent allegorical images of women with books, nor how the holy image affected a specifically French audience. The most recent scholarship on the Education focuses primarily on Spanish and English versions of the scene, creating a gap—a gap which I hope to fill—into which discourse on French Education scenes should fit. Although I rely heavily on Spanish and English works to build my argument, they only help to further illuminate a genre of French art that has been more or less overlooked.

In his book *Iconografía de Santa Ana en Sevilla y Triana*, Calderón Benjumea proposes that sixteenth-century Spanish images of St. Anne Teaching the Virgin to Read may have explicitly appealed to, and subsequently empowered, a select group of literate

3. Sandra Zimdars-Swartz, “The Virgin Mary: Mother as Intercessor and Savior of Society,” in *Seeing Female: Social Roles and Personal Lives*, ed. Sharon Brehm (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 71.

citizens, the members of the local literary academies who were, of course, all-male.⁴ Benjumea's supposition raises the question of whether the common aristocratic woman was allowed the privilege of literacy at all, and necessarily leads one to fifteenth- and sixteenth-century texts, fraught with layer upon layer of behavioral instruction for the proper patrician woman, especially concerning education. What we will find from these texts is that woman's education was largely restricted to only that information which she needed to know to run the household or to gain biblical understanding. Written for Catherine of Aragon as a guide for raising her daughter Mary Tudor, Juan Luis Vives's *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* is quite clear in its delineation of what is—or, rather, what is not—proper for the young princess's education. The chapters' headings alone are telling to sixteenth-century popular discourse. The chapter entitled "What Books Be to Be Read and What Not" insists the superfluosness of books which "have none other matter but of war and love," and, conversely, the necessity of religious literature.⁵ From the same current, the Franciscan friar Juan de la Cerda, in his 1599 manifesto *Politica de Todos los Estados de Mugeres*, matter-of-factly claims that "devotional books stimulate Christian virtue, but the popular romances only fill a girl's head with idle fancies."⁶ Furthermore, Jesuit Gaspar Astete assumes an unmistakably misogynistic position in his *Tratado del Gobierno de la Familia, y Estado de las Viudas y Donzellas*, stating that

teaching women to read and write served no purpose whatsoever, because they would not earn their keep nor personal glory with their pens...Just as the pen in

4. Taggard, "Murillo's *St. Anne Teaching the Virgin to Read*," 31.

5. Foster Watson, ed., *Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women* (New York: Longmans Green & Co., 1912), 56-57.

6. Taggard, "Murillo's *St. Anne Teaching the Virgin to Read*," 37.

hand and the sword in the sheath is a man's glory, a woman's glory is the spindle in her hand, the thread in the spinning wheel, and the eye (of the needle) in the sewing pillow.⁷

Almost two centuries earlier in France, but no less relevant, even a budding feminist writer like Christine de Pizan could not skirt the inevitable boundaries circumscribing women in her manual *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*. Of the education of girls, she instructs:

When the girl is old enough, the princess will wish her to learn to read. After she knows her religious offices and the Mass, she can be given books of devotion and contemplation or one's dealing with good behaviour. The princess will not tolerate books containing any vain things, follies or dissipation to be brought before her daughter, for the doctrine and teaching that the girl absorbs in her early childhood she usually remembers all her life.⁸

While de Pizan acknowledges the teacher/pupil relationship between mother and daughter that will be essential to Pamela Sheingorn's argument, Vives, la Cerda, Astete, and de Pizan all stress the impropriety of women reading secular novels of "war and love" and attribute it as a distraction from domestic responsibilities.

It is safe to assume that female literacy was acceptable, but only within certain cultural boundaries "[catered]...to encourage [in women] emulation of specific, usually religious, role models."⁹ In her gender study of sixteenth-century pastoral books, Elizabeth Rhodes reveals that though humanist and religious writers "were not as concerned that women were able to read as with *what* they were reading, most still held that if women could not be cajoled, flattered, or threatened into reading what men thought

7. Ibid.

8. Christine de Pizan, *Treasure of the City of Ladies* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 43.

9. Elizabeth Rhodes, "Skirting the Men: Gender Roles in Sixteenth-century Pastoral Books," *Journal of Hispanic Philology* 11 (1987): 136.

they should, then they obviously should not read at all.”¹⁰ One such book, most assuredly censored by the Inquisition, is Jorge de Montemayor’s *La Diana*, a pastoral known with some apprehension by some of its contemporaries for its liberated female characters. Rhodes notes that the “sentimental” matters (namely, love) and defiant lead female characters of the book must have attracted a primarily female readership, a nightmare for men who wanted to prevent literature from implanting in women’s heads a notion of empowerment.¹¹ The shepherdess protagonist Diana, for instance, roams the countryside unsupervised and unrestricted by the limitations of the male-dominated court.¹² She even meets her lover Syrenus in the woods, and with the two of them alone, forwardly expresses the intentions of her heart. Syrenus recounts:

What saiest thou memorie? That in this medow I beheld my Lady *Diana*, that in the same I began to feel that, which I shal never leave of to lament, That neere to that cleere fountaine (set about with high and greene Sicamours) with many teares she solemnly sware to me, that there was not the deerest thing in the world, no, not the will of her parents, the perswasion of her brethren, nor the importunities of her allies, that were able to remoove her from her setled thoughts?¹³

One cannot be surprised that clergymen were alarmed by and even despised the notion of liberation planted in female readers’ heads by the freedom of Diana and other female characters of Montemayor’s book. Benjumea’s argument for the promotion of male literacy in *Education of the Virgin* scenes is surely strengthened by the momentum of centuries-old derogatory sentiment toward female literacy.

10. Ibid., 135.

11. Ibid., 132, 134.

12. Ibid., 141.

13. Judith Kennedy, ed., *A Critical Edition of Yung’s Translation of George of Montemayor’s Diana and Gil Polo’s Enamoured Diana* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 12.

Benjumea is also supported by the visual evidence itself. The Education of the Virgin, such as that painted by Juan de Roelas, theoretically thwarted books such as *La Diana*, “in which women want to be dominant and do not know their place,” and thereby reminding men of their superior position in the hierarchy of life (Fig. 2).¹⁴ The all-male religious sect of the Shod Mercedarian in Seville commissioned the esteemed Roelas to paint his *St. Anne Teaching the Virgin to Read* as part of a Counter-Reformation agenda, which called for a more aggressive declaration of the Virgin’s perfection.¹⁵ Most significantly, Roelas, as Mindy Taggard points out, like many other Western European artists echoed in his art society’s overarching sentiment that “reading and learning were the domain of man and the perfect Virgin Mary [alone].”¹⁶ Lay women even came to be viewed as deviant when they adopted a portrait convention appropriate for the mother of Christ and man, but not the average woman. Excluding women altogether from an intellectual reading of the Education, artists instead facilitated a more “proper” reading, appealing to the only sensitivity they presumably had—that of motherhood.

So how is it that women could have ever interacted with the Education in a patriarchal society? Benjumea does not address how the image may have affected the most obvious cultural group, women, even though two women are traditionally the focus of the scene. In 1993, Pamela Sheingorn picked up where Benjumea left off in her ambitious, but seemingly incomplete article, “The Wise Mother: the Image of St. Anne

14. Tom Brandenburg, “St. Anne and Her Family: The Veneration of St. Anne in Connection with Concepts of Marriage and the Family in the Early-modern Period,” in *Saints and She-Devils: Images of Women in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, ed. Lene Dresen-Coenders (London: The Rubicon Press, 1987), 120.

15. Taggard, “Murillo’s *St. Anne Teaching the Virgin to Read*,” 34.

16. *Ibid.*, 36.

Teaching the Virgin Mary.”¹⁷ Where Benjumea suggested that the Education of the Virgin elicited a male reaction, Sheingorn argued just the opposite—that “it promulgated the notion of mothers as teachers and daughters as apt and willing pupils, just as it celebrated literacy, especially among upper and middle class women.”¹⁸ Evidence shows that, indeed, a common form of interaction between mothers and daughters was education, as home schooling was for many families more economical than hiring a governess, and the predominate lack of Latin literacy “[made] informal teaching seem possible.”¹⁹ De Pizan, who instructed her own children, writes adamantly about this as well, although notably removing the bulk of boys’ raising from under her own authority:

If she has children she should watch over them and their upbringing diligently, even the sons, although it is the father’s responsibility to seek a teacher for them and take on such governors as are good and suitable...The wise princess will take care how [her children] are disciplined, and she will be very interested in those who have charge of them, and how they carry out their duties...She will see them go to bed and get up and see how they are disciplined. It is no dishonor for a princess to do such things, for children are the greatest haven, security and ornament that she can have” (Fig. 3).²⁰

Furthermore, sometimes Anne is depicted teaching the Virgin from an “a.b.c.” book, or primer, instead of a religious text, such as in a wall painting at St. Mary’s Church in Mentmore, Buckinghamshire, England. In it, Anne teaches the Virgin from a “scroll marked with the first letters of the alphabet.”²¹ Another example is the early

17. Ibid., 31.

18. Pamela Sheingorn, “The Wise Mother: The Image of St. Anne Teaching the Virgin Mary,” *Gesta* 32, no. 1 (1993): 69.

19. Wendy Scase, “St. Anne and the Education of the Virgin: Literacy and Artistic Traditions and Their Implications,” in *England in the Fourteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1991 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. Nicholas Rogers (Stamford: P. Watkins, 1993), 92.

20. De Pizan, *Treasure of the City of Ladies*, 41.

21. The wall painting in St. Mary’s Church in Mentmore no longer exists as it was destroyed in the nineteenth century; Scase, “St. Anne and the Education of the Virgin,” 92.

sixteenth-century Primer of Claude of France:

On the first page St. Anne presents the Virgin Mary and [the young] Claude of France to Claude's name saint, Claude of Besançon. Claude holds a closed book, and seems to seek St. Claude's support and assistance as she begins her reading lessons. On the last page Claude kneels before her own open book, following along as St. Anne teaches the Virgin. Having reached the last page of her primer, she can now read. But the primer insists more directly that Claude's literacy is her mother's responsibility, for Claude's mother was named Anne (Figs. 4, 5).²²

Claude's primer, along with the Bedford Hours of Anne of Burgundy, which also depicts a woman kneeling with a book before her patron saint, supports the theory that the Education scene is often tied to Books of Hours owned by women patrons (Fig. 6).²³ Certainly, Sheingorn's argument holds weight; however, I am not convinced that the teacher/pupil relationship of mothers and daughters was the only message conveyed to women in the Education, considering woman's overt subjugation to the home, an issue that would certainly not escape the predominantly male patrons and artists of seventeenth-century art.

Mindy Taggard criticizes both Benjumea and Sheingorn in her 1999 "Murillo's St. Anne Teaching the Virgin to Read and the Question of Female Literacy and Learning in Golden Age Spain." She accuses Sheingorn's interpretation of overlooking the Virgin's status as "an impossible role model ever reminding women of their female inferiority," and Benjumea's of "overlooking the powerful appeal of St. Anne Teaching the Virgin to Read to the same female viewers, who saw their private domestic milieu reflected in the familiar intimacy of the lesson."²⁴ Essentially, Taggard explains

22. Sheingorn, "The Wise Mother," 76.

23. Ibid., 74.

24. Taggard, "Murillo's *St. Anne Teaching the Virgin to Read*," 31.

convincingly that the Education of the Virgin appealed to men and women equally, though in completely different ways. For instance, Murillo's *St. Anne Teaching the Virgin to Read* has certain qualities of "endearing humanity" so sincere that some scholars have speculated that Murillo's own wife and daughter were the inspirations for Anne and the Virgin (Fig. 7). Furthermore, "familiar domesticity" is suggested by the knitting basket in the bottom left corner, together with the humanized Virgin and St. Anne, presumably a major attraction for lay women.²⁵ The domestic imagery of Murillo's painting certainly fit into the greater social and religious movement sweeping Spain and the rest of Europe at the time, the Counter-Reformation. The Spanish clergy of the Catholic Church, reviving the traditional social hierarchy with men at the top and women just below them, staunchly held that God had created women for one reason alone, to serve men—"simple and domestic, and thus he did not endow her with the mental capacity required for reading and study."²⁶ In Murillo's painting, only the Virgin and St. Anne can see the text of the book anyway, diverting the female viewer's attention to the basket in the corner.²⁷ If we reconsider Roelas's painting, we can see the same kind of basket in the bottom right corner, and in both versions, the basket is as large as or larger than the book. This is even more so the case in seventeenth-century Annunciations (an interesting correlation, we shall see), when artists such as Francisco de Zurbarán had "offset Mary's book of devotions resting open up her *prie dieu* with a sewing basket, whose purpose is to remind viewers manual skills are the duty of all Christian women,

25. Ibid., 36.

26. Ibid., 36.

27. Ibid., 39.

including the Virgin” (Fig. 8).²⁸

In a sense, the Virgin Mary proved an excellent role model for lay women, as her own education prepared her for the domestic duties of mothering Jesus and, furthermore, for executing the orders of God, her heavenly husband. As early as the second century, questions of Mary’s education and literacy were promulgated by various accounts of the Virgin’s life. For example, the *Protevangelium of James* narrates the story of Mary’s dwelling in the Temple during her formative years:

Joachim said to Anne: ‘Behold, the days of the child being with us here are over. Ask to send for all the virgins who are dedicated to God among the daughters of the Hebrews, and let them each take a lamp in their hands to take the child with honor and in purity unto the holy temple, as it is proper.’ So they brought her and had her sit on the third step, and the Lord God granted her grace and wisdom. And an angel, having come down from heaven, waited on her at table; and the angel nurtured her with the grace of the Holy Spirit. And she heard daily the utterances and the songs of angels there in the sanctuary, and she stayed there for twelve years.²⁹

According to the *Protevangelium*, the Virgin was educated in the Temple by God himself and presumably the rabbis who lived there. We see a visual confirmation of the *Protevangelium* in a thirteenth-century stained-glass window from Chartres Cathedral which depicts Mary in a classroom with four other students and a teacher.³⁰ From the fourteenth century is a book of sermons commissioned by a sisterhood of Cistercian nuns from the diocese of Constance which contains a full-page historiated initial “showing Mary [in a similar fashion] as a member of a class of girls taught by a schoolmaster” (Fig.

28. Ibid., 37.

29. Abraham Terian, *The Armenian Gospel of the Infancy: With Three Early Versions of the Protevangelium of James* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 12-13.

30. Sheingorn, “The Wise Mother,” 69.

9).³¹ Scase and Sheingorn both point out that accounts of the Virgin's education are, however, contradictory and, by and large, problematic to the interpretation of the Education of the Virgin. For instance, a ninth century text written by a monk of Constantinople, Epiphanius, relates a home-bound education for the Virgin, administered by Anne and Joachim themselves, the very picture of the holy family in day-to-day accord.³² The text was later fused with other similar narrations into the poem *Vita Rhythmica*, in which, after her betrothal to Joseph, Mary returns home for a time where 'this child was properly educated by her parents, and was instructed by them in every discipline.'³³ And what of the accounts that Mary was *born* literate? Sheingorn elucidates that, contemporaneously with the growth of the cult of the Virgin, "the idea developed that because she was the Mother of God, Mary must have been both spiritually and intellectually gifted."³⁴ Moreover, the *Pseudo-Matthew* declares that "no one could be found who was better instructed than she (Mary) in wisdom and in the law of God, who was more skilled in singing the songs of David (Psalms)," and even Albert the Great professed Mary's knowledge of the Seven Liberal Arts.³⁵ Most intriguingly, the general consensus was that the divine wisdom had entered the Virgin's body "at the instant of her immaculate conception and not by reading books," which explains the origin of the image

31. Ibid., 69-70.

32. Scase, "St. Anne and the Education of the Virgin," 88-89.

33. Ibid., 90.

34. Sheingorn, "The Wise Mother," 69.

35. Ibid.

as the Immaculate Conception.³⁶ The inconsistency of the accounts, more specifically that the Education of the Virgin has no one reliable textual foundation, implies a particularly allegorical purpose for the scene besides just illustrating the life of the Virgin as one of so many other apocryphal scenes.³⁷ Despite the conflicting accounts of the Virgin's education, one clear message emerges from them all—as early as her conception, all the education afforded Mary, whether in the womb, at the Temple, or at home with Anne and Joachim, was solely for the benefit of God, *the* patriarchal authority, to execute his master plan of salvation through Jesus Christ, and that single-purposed education of the Virgin indicates, in turn, the allegorical significance of the Education of the Virgin scene.

Seemingly minor details of various versions of the Education scene, often times the text of the book which the Virgin or St. Anne holds, clarify the function of Mary's education. On a fourteenth-century embroidered altar panel, for example, the Virgin's book is turned to the Vulgate text of Psalm 44:11-12, which reads: "Listen, daughter, and see, and incline your ear, for the King desires your beauty," a passage frequently assimilated into the bridegroom Christ's words toward "the Christian soul, more specifically to virgins, and most specifically, as here, to Mary."³⁸ We can interpret this Old Testament passage to actually be God himself requesting Mary's participation in his grand scheme, a request to which God will not accept a "no" answer, centuries before

36. Taggard suggests that the Education of the Virgin surfaced in Christian visual culture as a metaphor for the Immaculate Conception. The Education lasted as such until the sixteenth century when the Immaculate Conception got its own visual tradition—"the radiant woman crowned by the sun and stars and standing on the moon borrowed from St. John the Evangelist's vision on the Isle of Patmos"; Taggard, "Murillo's *St. Anne Teaching the Virgin to Read*," 33.

37. Sheingorn, "The Wise Mother," 71.

38. Ibid.

Mary was even born. Therefore, it is no coincidence that Annunciation scenes are often paired with Education scenes, as in a 1335 English panel painting today in the Cluny Museum.³⁹ The Annunciation, like the Psalms passage from the Vulgate text, foreshadows Mary's position in God's plan, and gives reason for her divine education.⁴⁰ Furthermore, aside from the Virgin, St. Anne held her own significance in God's plan as the grandmother of Jesus, doubly infusing divine providence into the Education. In Carthusian monk Wouter Bor's 1491 *Life of St. Anne*, the holy threesome is intrinsically bound together: "If you want to be Mary's friend/Be sure to be dedicated to her mother/Serve her with good faith/Jesus and Mary will not let it go unrewarded."⁴¹ From every facet, the Education exudes the idea that the Virgin is only significant because of her association with God and his Son, not because of any spiritual or intellectual powers she possesses on her own.

The education of Mary and her relationship with God are relatively similar to the education of lay women and their subservience to their husbands. For example, even the humanist writer Erasmus of Rotterdam allows for the education of women in the classics, but with the clarification that "cultured women are better companions for their husbands."⁴² From his *Colloquies*, the vignette "The Abbot and the Learned Lady" poses the metaphorical conversation between Antronius, a name synonymous with "ass" and represents the collective monastic enemies of Erasmus, and Magdalia, who represents Margaret Roper, Thomas More's daughter whom Erasmus greatly respected:

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. Brandenburg, "St. Anne and Her Family," 105.

42. Taggard, "Murillo's *St. Anne Teaching the Virgin to Read*," 36.

Antronijs: What furnishings do I see here?

Magdalia: Elegant, aren't they?

Antronijs: How elegant I don't know, but certainly unbecoming both to a young miss and a married woman.

Magdalia: Why?

Antronijs: Because the whole place is filled with books.⁴³

Later, Antronijs asserts that "it's not feminine to be brainy," and "[he's] sure [he] wouldn't want a learned wife," to which Magdalia responds, "But I congratulate myself on having a husband different from you. For learning renders him dearer to me, and me dearer to him."⁴⁴ In light of Erasmus's text, women easily become nothing more than "obedient helpmates" to their husbands, their very existence intended to support their husbands.⁴⁵ Although Erasmus's writing contradicts that of the Spanish theologians, who believed women should only read religious texts if any at all, the humanist and his traditionalist counterparts would presumably all agree that woman's proper role was beneath man, and all her everyday activities should in the end serve to complement her husband. In this light, Sheingorn's suggestion that the image of a woman reading, whether the Virgin Mary or a lay woman, "may most frequently have been part of an image of submissive behavior," is more relevant than ever.⁴⁶ Such an image would only become increasingly prevalent approaching the eighteenth century.

The Education of the Virgin by no means fizzled out of European religious culture even into the eighteenth century, and was just as prominent in France as anywhere else. We see many of the same characteristics of the Spanish Education scenes in French

43. Desiderius Erasmus, *Colloquies of Erasmus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 219.

44. Ibid., 219, 222.

45. Taggard, "Murillo's *St. Anne Teaching the Virgin to Read*," 36.

46. Sheingorn, "The Wise Mother," 78.

versions of the same scene. For example, today the Frick Collection includes a version of the *Education of the Virgin* by Georges de la Tour, presumed to be the “Saint Anne” recorded in the 1653 inventory of the marquis de La Ferté (Fig. 10).⁴⁷ The Frick painting has shed the traditional classical architectural or draped space seen in Murillo and Roelas’s versions, respectively, but maintains key elements that underscore woman’s domestic role—the sewing basket directly behind St. Anne’s right arm, and the book, whose text is undecipherable but presumably alludes to the Virgin’s role in God’s design. Interestingly, La Tour painted at least four other known versions of his *Education*, two of which deviate little from the Frick painting, a third that depicts a full-length Virgin and her mother, and even a fourth that employs the same composition, but of a sewing rather than reading lesson in progress.⁴⁸ Over a century later, Jean-Honoré Fragonard visited Venice and observed and sketched Giovanni Battista Tiepolo’s 1732 version of the Education scene at Santa Maria della Fava, and then painted his own in the ‘70s (Fig. 11). Before 1800, he had painted or drawn at least four more versions.⁴⁹ Though all five versions vary in detail, most of them depict the Virgin and St. Anne within a heavenly realm, accompanied by angels. The sewing basket has been omitted, but in its place is a white cat just barely in the periphery of one of the paintings and two of the drawings. Instead of the sewing basket, the cat, known traditionally for its femininity and its natural

47. Philip Conisbee, *Georges de la Tour and His World* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1996), 123-124; The “sloppy” treatment of the Frick painting have given conservators reason to believe that Georges’s son, Étienne, may have actually been the artist. However, there is no conclusive evidence to assign either Georges or Etienne as the actual artist of the painting.

48. Ibid., 123-124.

49. Pierre Rosenberg and Marion Stewart, *French Paintings: 1500-1825, The Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, 1987), 166.

inclination to return home, reminds the viewer that woman's place is in the home.⁵⁰

Surprisingly, the Education scene of the eighteenth century perhaps most in keeping with the precedence set by the Spanish versions is that of François Boucher (Fig. 12). One could almost replace Murillo's *St. Anne Teaching the Virgin to Read* with Boucher's *Education of the Virgin* in Taggard's essay with little consequence. Boucher's *Education* treads new ground for the eighteenth century, depicting Joachim in his Education scene, a possible cue from Rubens's *Education* of ca. 1625 (Fig. 13).⁵¹ Boucher's *Education* is especially significant for two reasons. First of all, Boucher depicts a particularly humanized holy family, which coincides with the content of contemporary Jesuit sermons. "Characterized by a sentimentalist vocabulary in which terms such as *coeur, heureux, amour, soupir, tendre, and larme* [occurred] frequently," Martin Scheider explains in his essay, "Between *Grâce* and *Volupté*: Boucher and Religious Painting," the sermons emphasized a tender rather than vengeful God.⁵² In his sermon *Sur l'amour de Dieu*, Father Pierre Claude Frey de Neuville declared: "The God of anger and vengeance, the God of power and majesty, has practically disappeared: He now appears everywhere to you as the God of peace and silence, as a tender God, offering you his heart."⁵³ This perspective on the divine is echoed in religious visual culture from the middle of the seventeenth century on, a more human, sentimental style

50. John Bradshaw, *The Behaviour of the Domestic Cat* (Wallingford, Oxon: CAB International, 1992), 11.

51. Rosenberg and Stewart, *French Paintings*, 112-113.

52. Martin Schieder, "Between *Grâce* and *Volupté*: Boucher and Religious Painting," in *Rethinking Boucher*, ed. Melissa Hyde and Mark Ledbury (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2006), 71.

53. Ibid.

slowly replacing the once grand, baroque style of representing the divine.⁵⁴ Furthermore, even Boucher's most discerning critics point out his humanized depictions of the Virgin. In his 1754 *Sentimens sur quelques ouvrages de peinture, sculpture et gravure*, La Font de Saint-Yenne complains: "The gravest error...in all the Virgins painted today, is that they have no dignity in the physiognomies, which are all taken from those of pretty commoners."⁵⁵ Boucher's *Education* is also significant because it includes the Virgin's earthly father, creating a painting doubly heavy with patriarchal authority. That Joachim was increasingly important to an eighteenth-century audience is also reflected in a rare, early eighteenth-century Spanish version of the Education, in which an anonymous artist blots out Anne completely, Joachim in her place (Fig. 14).⁵⁶ Compared to Murillo's *St. Anne Teaching the Virgin to Read*, which has been characterized as particularly sentimental, Boucher's *Education* emerges as equally if not more humanized with its Virgin based on "pretty commoners," tangible, earthly patriarch, and sewing basket in the bottom left corner. The religious story of St. Anne teaching the Virgin Mary is almost altogether overshadowed by a scene of common, familial harmony. Certainly the tender, domestic quality of Boucher's painting would have appealed to eighteenth-century women and encouraged them to fulfill their wifely duties. Just as with Murillo's painting, women would have been more attracted to the sewing basket in Boucher's painting than the book, whose text is restricted from the viewer. Perhaps even more than its Spanish predecessors Boucher's *Education* proves subversive to lay women,

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid., 80.

56. Fernando Moreno Cuadro, *San Juan de la Cruz y Córdoba: El Convento de Santa Ana* (Córdoba: Monte de Piedad y Caja de Ahorros de Córdoba, 1989), 138.

confirming Taggard's argument that the realm of education was ultimately within the reach of men and the Virgin only.

Under such stifling conditions, eighteenth-century lay women found a need to break free from their traditionally domestic role, in both reality and visual culture; they found this outlet in allegorical portraiture by using the conventions of men and the Virgin Mary. Christine de Pizan's *Mutation of Fortune*, a half-biographical, half-allegorical volume, foreshadows women's empowerment via allegory by nearly four centuries. After the death of her husband, a grief-stricken de Pizan is approached by Lady Fortune, who performs a sex-change on the writer's body:

Then my mistress came to me, she who gives joy to many, and she touched me all over my body; she palpated and took in her hands each bodily part, I remember it well; then she departed...I awakened and things were such that, immediately and with certainty, I felt myself completely transformed...Fortune had thus not hated me, she who had transformed me, for she had instantly changed the great fear and doubt in which I had been completely lost. Then I felt myself much lighter than usual and I felt that my flesh was changed and strengthened, and my voice was much lower, and my body harder and faster. However, the ring that Hymen had given me had fallen from my finger.⁵⁷

Barbara Newman asserts that "Christine gains what her sex had initially denied her, the right and obligation to chart the course of her own voyage...The virile woman [who has, in essence, become a man] is one who possesses the intelligence, courage, and integrity that cultural norms denied to women as such."⁵⁸ Perhaps Marie de' Medici is one of the first women to fully attempt the assumption of masculine convention in art. In 1625, about the same time as Rubens painted his *Education of the Virgin*, he also painted a 21-

57. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Kevin Browlee, *Selected Writings of Christine de Pizan: New Translations, Criticism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1997), 106.

58. Barbara Newman, "Did Goddesses Empower Women? The Case of Dame Nature," in *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 150-151.

panel cycle of the life of Marie, the queen consort of France during the early seventeenth century. Margaret Carroll speculates that one of the panels, *The Education of Marie de' Medici*, was designed to emphasize “her independent political agency,” rather than her “performance of wifely and maternal duties” (Fig. 15).⁵⁹ Rubens’ entire wall “devoted exclusively to the education of Marie” undoubtedly plays an invaluable role in establishing her “independent” identity as a ruler.⁶⁰ Marie is set within a grotto-like environment, and surrounded by classical, allegorical figures, such as the Three Graces, and Athena, identified by her plumed helmet, who guides the young Marie in her lesson. Carroll effectively argues that an education scene such as Marie’s “more conventionally appears in cycles of the lives of princes and kings,” such as the scene of *Dauphin Louis of Guyenne Listening to His Teachers*, and I would add in the traditional life of the Virgin cycles, thereby establishing Marie’s masculine qualities as she intently reads the book (Fig. 16).⁶¹ The scene portrays Marie obtaining the widely accepted skills to be a ruler and also “makes a pointed intervention in the ongoing debate in early modern Europe about the capacity of females to be educated and, by extension, qualified to rule.”⁶² This necessary assimilation of a male portrait convention into a female portrait purposefully imposes masculine qualities upon Marie to demonstrate her as capable of authority.

By the eighteenth century, aristocratic women followed the trend set by Marie de' Medici, but only within the confines of domesticity. Artists appropriated the Education for lay women, who were depicted instructing their daughters, commonly in

59. Margaret D. Carroll, *Painting and Politics in Northern Europe: Van Eyck, Bruegel, Rubens, and Their Contemporaries* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 102.

60. Ibid., 109.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

music. Fragonard's *Music Lesson*, for example, shows a woman overseeing her daughter's piano-playing. The two are closely situated, almost facing one another; without the musical context, the pair could be a contemporarily dressed St. Anne and Virgin poring over a religious text, complete with the same ominous-looking cat from Fragonard's *Education* (Fig. 17). Baron François-Pascal-Simon Gérard painted *Portrait of Comtesse de Morel-Vindé and Her Daughter*, or *The Music Lesson* in a similar manner (Fig. 18). Though the composition is quite different, the components are the same—mother, daughter, and instructional text. Moreover, it is important to note that the setting representing a salon in the Hôtel de Vindé, a property acquisitioned by the Comtesse's husband, and the detail of the girl's chair denoting the works of the Jacob Brothers boast the wealth of Monsieur Vindé.⁶³ Even when the patriarch is not actually depicted, his presence is still omniscient. Lastly, Sir Joshua Reynolds's 1760s *Portrait of Elizabeth Herbert, Countess of Pembroke with her Son, George, Lord Herbert* attests to the enduring influence of earlier Education scenes and their contemporary literature (Fig. 19). The painting presents a mother and child with a book, pausing mid-lesson to acknowledge the viewer, confined within the walls of a classical architectural space.

The eighteenth century also saw the popularity of a single woman holding a book in allegorical portraiture, particularly in France. Reynolds defines allegory in his seventh *Discourse* as “an ornament which ennobles both poetry and history painting, bringing about a harmony of the two arts.”⁶⁴ From a more modern perspective, Kathleen

63. Rosenberg and Stewart, *French Paintings*, 176.

64. Susan Seward, *The Golden Age of Marie de' Medici* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1982), 6.

Nicholson defines a very specific type of allegory in her article, “The Ideology of Feminine ‘Virtue’”:

Eighteenth-century French allegorical portraits of women are paradoxical hybrids: as images of specific individuals they presume to document a sitter’s physical appearance as well as confirm her social status; as projections of mythic or exotic identity they idealise both in terms of likeness and an operative construction of womanhood.⁶⁵

Nicholson’s address of portraits of women concurs with the fact that allegorical portraiture had fallen out of vogue for male sitters, “the few male allegorical portraits commissioned retaining only the most traditional allusions to gallant shepherds or Apollo or Hercules.”⁶⁶ On the other hand, women’s single-figure allegorical portraiture not only maintained its earliest sixteenth-century prototypes including themes of Diana, Flora, and Venus, but expanded to include many more, such as gardener, Hebe, and, essential to the next chapter, vestal virgin and Muse.⁶⁷ The point is that men did not need allegory to assert their power and authority, where women could not do so without it.

Though at first glance, the Education of the Virgin scene would seem to promote the intellectual capacity of Mary herself and even the learnedness of lay women, its function is quite the contrary. After an in-depth look at both current scholarship and the Education’s contemporaneous misogynistic literature from a feminist perspective, I have deduced one certain conclusion—firstly, that Mary’s significance comes only through her association with God and her role in solidifying his plan of salvation for mankind through his Son, and, secondly, her education is only a means of achieving that prescribed role.

65. Kathleen Nicholson, “The Ideology of Feminine ‘Virtue’: The Vestal Virgin in French Eighteenth-century Allegorical Portraiture,” in *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, ed. Joanna Woodall (New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 52.

66. *Ibid.*, 56.

67. *Ibid.*

Over a century's time, the Education of the Virgin evolved into allegorical portraiture of women with books, a genre that emerged, ironically, in an effort to combat all the gendered norms established by the Education scene. What began as an assimilation of portrait conventions of men and the Virgin Mary in order to raise the status of women within the social hierarchy could not escape the connotations of its origin—that, at least in early modern Western Europe, woman, and likewise her education, is intrinsically under the authority of man, whether in heaven or earth.

CHAPTER TWO

THE EDUCATION OF THE FALLEN WOMAN: EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY PORTRAITS OF WOMEN WITH BOOKS AS 'CONJUGAL' PENDANTS

The Nymph, though in this mangled Plight,
Must ev'ry Morn her Limbs unite.
But, how shall I describe her Arts
To recollect the scatter'd Parts?¹

The stanza from British writer Jonathan Swift's sardonic poem "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed" (1731) is highly symptomatic of the misogynistic culture in which it was written. Swift's Nymph is a prostitute whose limbs are, quite literally, dismantled, not by the Night, but by disease (syphilis); similarly, the eighteenth-century woman's identity was figuratively but equally dismantled into many parts, "scatter'd" by the malicious tongues of traditionalist critics. By no coincidence did women grasp for an outlet, a way to counteract the pervading derogatory treatment of the "feminine," at the same time women's self-esteem was arguably at an all-time low. From allegorical portraits in particular, women hoped to assert an identity that surpassed the limitations put on them by society; more specifically, allegorical portraits represented the great schism between how women were viewed, and how they *wanted* to be viewed.² Incorporating a book iconographically into the portraits, an object we have seen connotes both dignity and literacy and which was traditionally associated with men and the holy Virgin Mary, would seemingly only better the reputation of women. In this chapter, I will discuss, however, that as venerable as women desired themselves to be perceived,

1. Jonathan Swift, *The Essential Writings of Jonathan Swift* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 608.

2. Kathleen Nicholson, "The Ideology of Feminine 'Virtue': The Vestal Virgin in French Eighteenth-century Allegorical Portraiture," in *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, ed. Joanna Woodall (New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 57.

their assumption of virtuous, moral figures in allegorical portraiture would, at best, only attempt to embody the latter's admirable traits, often times not even convincing its audience of the moral character of its female sitters. I will examine four portraits: two allegorical portraits, a print after Francois-Hubert Drouais's *Madame de Pompadour as a Vestal Virgin* and an anonymous artist's *Marquise du Châtelet as Urania*, and two non-allegorical portraits, Vigée-Lebrun's *Comtesse de la Châtre* and Allan Ramsay's *Emily FitzGerald, Duchess of Leinster*, all of which depict women with questionable reputations holding books. By way of these four portraits, I hope to define a tradition of women's portraiture—a tradition into which Vigée-Lebrun's *Marie-Antoinette en Robe de Velours Bleu* will eventually fall—that is elevated by its employment of a book, an object directly associated with the realm of men (and the Virgin Mary). Just as their predecessor, the Virgin Mary, female sitters with books appear as ennobled only because of their association with powerful patriarchs, the heavenly Father-Husband, and worldly, cultured husbands, respectively.

Playwright Pierre Marivaux effectively dips our toes into the misogynistic culture of eighteenth-century France. Through the voice of his foreigner-narrator, Marivaux communicates the low self-esteem of purportedly vacant, even identity-less Parisian women. Without an exterior disguise of makeup and fancy dress, women who were undecorated found themselves as unfit for both public viewing and everyday interaction. When the narrator visits an allegedly beautiful woman before her morning *toilette*, she answers the door without her makeup, and likewise without her wits. The narrator describes her as “[not] entirely there,” and observes that upon encountering a woman “who has not yet arranged her physical assets, who has not made her preparations

for pleasing...you cannot really say that it is truly her.” Speaking for the woman, he then informs the reader that “she is telling you: This isn’t me, this is an ugly semblance of me, but you don’t see me yet. Wait, I am barely sketched out; two hours of toilette will finish me, after which you will judge me.”³ From Marivaux’s telling narration we can conclude that women’s identity was completely dependent on her social “face,” a disguise for the assumed thoughtless, empty minds of women. A study conducted by Roger de Piles during the late seventeenth century reveals women’s similarly insecure attitude, illuminating women’s focus on “the surface” and men’s on “inner substance.” He asked a variety of portrait sitters (presumably all of aristocratic standing), beginning with the king and descending down the social hierarchy, to describe themselves. He noted that men used active voices, such as, “I am this valorous captain who carries terrible might everywhere”; women, on the other hand, used passive voices, saying, “I am this proud woman whose noble manners *bring esteem*.”⁴ In both Marivaux and de Piles’s cases, women are tentative to emit presumption of any kind, walking on the egg shells unremorsefully dropped by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Denis Diderot, and various other writers and critics against female advancement. Considering the accounts of Marivaux and de Piles and, more importantly, the saturation of eighteenth-century gender-biased literature into French society, one is increasingly informed of women’s secondary position to men in society and their subsequent insecure self-image. Moreover, considering the presence of the book in women’s portraits, one becomes even more aware of literature’s effect on eighteenth-century woman’s perceived inferiority.

3. Ibid., 54.

4. Ibid.

The very structure of the eighteenth-century French family paved the way for misogynistic literature, while simultaneously poisoning women for an unglorified, domestic life. Jeffrey Merrick compares the French family to a “miniature kingdom,” a common analogy for the European familial unit, the husband/father as the patriarchal king, and wife/mother and children his loyal subjects. Supported by the laws of both nature and humankind, not solely God’s divine right as commentators indicated in the centuries just before, Enlightenment man prevailed over woman in “physical, mental, and moral” endeavors, robbing women of every possible avenue of success, save for domesticity.⁵ Artists such as Jacques-Louis David “depoliticized” women in paintings such as his *Oath of the Horatii*, which poses the Horatii men as strong and noble, willing to fight for the preservation of state, and the swooning women as incapable of controlling their emotions, “cast as outsiders in relation to the public and valued world of men” (Fig. 20).⁶ Furthermore, Jean-Baptiste Greuze in *The Good Mother* places woman not even in the vicinity of politics or men but rather in the home, crawling with children and surrounded by impending household chores (Fig. 21). No one, however, relegates women to the domestic sphere quite as successfully as writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose opinion holds a spectacularly prominent place amidst the discourse on the “feminine.” Rousseau was one of the most prolific and influential writers of the eighteenth century in various disciplines, but his discourses on women’s education and, by default, domestic duties—discourses that bear a notable resemblance to the writings, as already noted, of Juan Luis

5. Jeffrey Merrick, “Sexual Politics and Public Order in Late 18th c. France: The *Mémoires secrets* and the *Correspondance secreete*,” in *Forbidden History: The State, Society, and the Regulation of Sexuality in Modern Europe*, ed. John C. Fout (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 171.

6. Natalie Boymel Kampen, “The Muted Other: Gender and Morality in Augustan Rome and Eighteenth-century Europe,” in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary Garrard (New York: IconEditions, 1992), 165-66.

Vives and Gaspar Astete—are most relevant to this thesis. Our perspective today of eighteenth-century “domesticized femininity” is chiefly due to Rousseau’s writings, devised as a reaction to Enlightenment ideology which asserted equality between men and women.⁷ In 1762, Rousseau wrote a treatise titled *Émile*, or *On Education*, that specifically defines the boundaries between male and female education, or rather, an ideal, “‘natural’ education.”⁸ In her book on French education, Geraldine Hodgson points out that, initially, Rousseau appears to find only one difference between man and woman—gender. However, his actual opinion quickly surfaces: that when all is said and done, “man must do the general work of the world...and that woman must be the mother and supply the domestic element.”⁹ Sophie, the heroine of the book, embodies Rousseau’s ideal femininity. She “devotes her whole life to serving God by doing good, ...[loving] virtue, ...[and realizing] the respective rights and responsibilities of the two sexes.”¹⁰ Rousseau believed that according to the laws of nature, men and women equally have the right to education, but only that education which was “suitable” for each respective sex.¹¹ In Rousseau’s own generalizing words: “What the little girl most clearly desires is to dress her doll, to make its bows, its tippets, its sashes, and its tuckers...here is a motive for her earliest lessons...Little girls always dislike learning to

7. Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam, eds., *Women, Art, and Politics of Identity in Eighteenth-century Europe* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2003), 5; It is important to note that Rousseau is difficult to categorize. Though he is known as an “Enlightenment” thinker, his ideology contradicts the doctrines of the more “orthodox” Enlightenment thinkers who supported the education of women. For further reading see Hyde and Milam, *Women, Art and Politics of Identity*; Geraldine Hodgson, *Studies in French Education from Rabelais to Rousseau* (New York: B. Franklin, 1969); and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile, or On Education* (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

8. Jane English, *Sex Equality* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 42.

9. Hodgson, *Studies in French Education*, 191.

10. *Ibid.*, 196.

11. *Ibid.*, 192.

read and write, but they are always ready to learn to sew.”¹² In Rousseau’s eyes, woman’s highest duty, and subsequently highest lesson, was to “be pleasing in [man’s] sight, to win his respect and love...to make his life pleasant and happy,” establishing woman’s education *and* identity as “planned in relation to man,” rather than to her intellectual capacity or her own natural character.¹³

Denis Diderot follows Rousseau as a close second in terms of the influence of traditionalist gendered ideology. In 1761, Diderot wrote *L’Eloge de Richardson* in just one day, divulging the characteristics, which, in his opinion, construct a “good novel.”¹⁴ He praised English novelist Samuel Richardson for his novel *Pamela, Or Virtue Rewarded*, in which, according to Diderot, the author wove together a story of the utmost truth and morality as personified in its heroine Pamela.¹⁵ Diderot “went so far as to prefer Richardson’s fiction to truth itself: ‘Oh Richardson, I dare say that the truest of histories is filled with lies, whereas your novel is filled with truth.’”¹⁶ Pamela reigns virtuous in the story when she is able time and again to resist the sexual advances of her master Mr. B. Most importantly, the sentiments of female domesticity are present clearly in Richardson’s own words, via a letter his heroine Pamela writes to her parents: “For I am watched very narrowly; and [Mr. B] says to Mrs. Jervis, ‘This girl is always scribbling; I think she may be better employed.’ And yet I work very hard with my needle, upon his linen, and the fine linen of the family; and am, besides, about flowering

12. English, *Sex Equality*, 45-46.

13. *Ibid.*, 45.

14. Lawrence W. Lynch, *Eighteenth-Century French Novelists and the Novel* (York, South Carolina: French Literature Publications Co., 1979), 114.

15. *Ibid.*, 116.

16. *Ibid.*, 115.

him a waistcoat.”¹⁷ The effects of her girlhood education, founded primarily on the fulfillment of men’s needs, is now seen clearly in the duties of Richardson’s woman-heroine Pamela, whose own desire to write is criticized when it threatens to push Mr. B’s wants to the back-burner.¹⁸

Rousseau increases the load for the beasts of domestic burden, assigning them not only the role of obedient and obliging spouse, but also of their children’s teacher—notably with special attention to their sons, an all too familiar notion promulgated by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers, and most proverbially by artists of the Education of the Virgin scenes. Rousseau posits that woman’s job is “to be pleasing in [man’s] sight, to win *his* respect and love, to train *him* in childhood, to tend to *him* in manhood, to counsel and console, to make *his* life pleasant and happy, these are the duties of woman for all time, and this is what she should be taught while she is young [my italics].”¹⁹ Rousseau’s sentiments are echoed in Hugh Downman’s narrative poem, *Infancy, or The Management of Children, a Didactic Poem in Six Books*, originally published in 1774 in Edinburgh. Downman recognizes the Virgin Mary’s connection to woman’s rearing little boys in such a way that ensures a noble future for them, invoking the holy mother’s assistance: “Come Virgin! teach/How on the government of these first years/Depends the future man; no vulgar theme,/No fruitless task, experiencing thy

17. Samuel Richardson, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (London: Penguin Books, 1980), 54.

18. Ironically, Pamela’s virtue is emphasized when she does *not* fulfill one specific demand of Mr. B—that of sexual desire. He relentlessly pursues a premarital sexual relationship with Pamela, and she declines him every time until they are married. Even though she does not fulfill his *every* desire, she is still praised as a virtuous woman remaining within her gendered domestic space; See Richardson, *Pamela*, 123.

19. English, *Sex Equality*, 45.

aid.”²⁰ The entire poem is basically one incredibly lengthy set of instructions for women to use during the earliest years of their children’s lives, intermittent with special emphasis on the training of boys—the leaders of tomorrow, rather than girls—the housekeepers of tomorrow. Madame d’Epinay wrote compellingly about the injustices of girls’ education as seen in Downman’s poem, most likely because she experienced them in their most insulting form. After her father’s death, Louise (the writer’s childhood name) and her mother moved in with her aunt and four cousins, and was, much to Louise’s happiness, invited to one of her cousin’s lessons. Nevertheless, little Louise was expelled from the lessons when she surpassed her cousin’s intellectual capacity.²¹ In Madame d’Epinay’s case, her academic excellence was actually discouraged.

The visual arts more than kept up with the literary discourse of the time, as seen, for example, in the works of Greuze and Vigée-Lebrun. Both artists depict young boys, Greuze an anonymous schoolboy and Vigée-Lebrun her brother Étienne, involved in their primer books, a popular theme established by Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin (Figs. 22, 23).²² On the other hand, Greuze portrays countless young maidens with the “feminine” (clearly domestic) objects such as sewing baskets, and Vigée-Lebrun depicts her daughter Julie reading the Bible, one of the few books approved for girls to read (Figs. 24, 25).

The question must be asked: in the face of such oppression, why would women even attempt to liberate themselves? More specifically, *could* women even conceive of

20. Hugh Downman, *Infancy, or the Management of Children: A Didactic Poem in Three Books* (Edinburgh: Printed for John Bell, 1776), 8.

21. Ruth Plaut Weinreb, “Emilie or *Émile*? Madame d’Epinay and the Education of Girls in Eighteenth-century France,” in *Eighteenth-century Women and the Arts*, ed. Frederick Keener and Susan Lorsch (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 58.

22. Joseph Baillio, *Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, 1755-1842* (Fort Worth: Kimbell Art Museum, 1982), 30-32.

liberating themselves at this time? Perhaps they were at least in part inspired by atypical men who sympathized with woman's plight, in addition to free-thinking women who saw for themselves a different fate. In the great comprehensive volume *Encyclopédie*, the Chevalier de Jaucourt comments on the status of woman in one of the four essays on women, *Femme (droit nat)*.²³ Abby Kleinbaum interprets Jaucourt to "readily [conclude] that male dominance is the result of civil law and not of nature." He credits nature as the promoter of equality for all humanity; acknowledges that the generalization of all men as physically or mentally stronger than all women is false; and notes that even the Bible bespeaks of equality of men and women *before* the Fall.²⁴ Earlier in the eighteenth century, Charles de Secondat Montesquieu sets a precedence for de Jaucourt and his similarly-minded contemporaries. Although Montesquieu does not take an especially "pro-woman" stance in his *Persian Letters* of 1721, the novel's final letter from Roxana to her husband Uzbek exemplifies the expected obedience of wives to their husbands, and one woman's rejection of it. Roxana objects:

How could you ever have imagined that I could be so credulous as to believe I was stationed on this earth to worship your caprices, and that, while everything was permitted to yourself, you had the right to curb my desires? No! Though I have lived in servitude I have always been free, I have modified your laws in harmony with those of nature, and my spirit has ever been disenthralled.²⁵

As for women writers, Madame d'Epinay establishes her place in early feminist literature through her 1774 *Conversations d'Emilie*. The heroine Emilie, a clever homophonic play

23. The *Encyclopédie* was edited by Diderot, a figure whom I have already established as a misogynistic writer. His stance would appear to contradict that of the Chevalier de Jaucourt. The best explanation for this contradiction is that Diderot was allowing for the variety of perspectives permeating the Enlightenment.

24. Abby R. Kleinbaum, "Women in the Age of Light," in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 220.

25. Charles de Secondat Montesquieu, *Persian Letters* (London: Athenaeum Publishing Co., 1897), 290-291.

on Rousseau's *Émile*, is the absolute antithesis of Rousseau's Sophie. Emilie is "sternly warned not to act merely to please another person, but rather to follow her own conscience...to work hard, to impose self-discipline, to cultivate strength."²⁶ Perhaps the climax of d'Epinay and Rousseau's disagreement is the treatment of dolls. For example, "Emilie's doll...is present not to be dressed and changed by her; it functions in an ingenious intellectual exercise in which Emilie invents a dialogue between them, plays the two roles, and raises and solves intricate questions."²⁷ British writer Mary Wollstonecraft agreed with Rousseau's treatises on the education of men—"that virtue and independence are traits that result from a perfect education," but also believed they should be extended to women. She lamented that women used their association with men (through marriage), and not their own faculties, to achieve power and respect, "and that their education prepared them poorly even for this status."²⁸ Wollstonecraft's fellow-Briton Lady Mary Wortley Montagu also mourned the second-class status of women to men, venturing "to think (if [she] dare say it) that Nature has not plac'd us in an inferior Rank to Men, no more than the Females of other Animals, where we see no distinction of capacity."²⁹ And, finally, the Marquise du Châtelet, whose portrait I will soon discuss, defends a woman's right to education, writing in her essay on *bonheur* that women's only hope for *gloire* is through her studies, because she cannot achieve it through war

26. Weinreb, "Emilie or *Émile*?" 60.

27. Ibid.

28. Kleinbaum, "Women in the Age of Light," 231.

29. Robert Halsband, "Ladies of Letters in the Eighteenth Century," in *Stuart and Georgian Moments: Clark Library Seminar Papers on Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century English Literature*, ed. Earl Miner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 275.

conquests or public offices as man.³⁰ Essentially, du Châtelet, despite her early-feminist voice in literature and defense of woman's education, still finds realms of the public life of men that she cannot infiltrate.

Women, in the footsteps of men, obviously saw books as an agent of distinction, the very embodiment of education. A portrait convention established by men, and appropriated by women, the book even from the most basic interpretation connotes the status of man. Nineteenth-century writers Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, in response to eighteenth-century portraits of women with books in general, note:

Intelligence dwells in these women's heads and in their faces. The brow is meditative. The shadow of a reading or the caress of a thought flows over it, ever so lightly...In all these faces there is the determination and flash of a virile thought, a depth in their very *multinerie*, an indefinable quality of meditation and penetration, *that blending of the man and the stateswoman* [my italics].³¹

Though the de Goncourt brothers' description is largely romanticized, it is not too far removed from the sentiment of an expert, so to speak, on the matter. British writer and art critic Sir Joshua Reynolds more clearly expresses the motive for woman's adoption of a masculine convention, and for that matter, mythological themes in general. In his *Discourse* VIII, Reynolds reminds his audience of the superiority of the "more manly, noble and dignified manner," characteristics typically associated with history painting, and therefore also masculine virtue.³² Gill Perry conjectures that "in Reynolds's *Discourses* it is the 'manly' style [and assumption of the antique] which can instill

30. Mary Sheriff, "The Naked Truth? The Allegorical Frontispiece and Woman's Ambition in Eighteenth-century France," in *Early Modern Visual Allegory: Embodying Meaning*, ed. Cristelle Baskins and Lisa Rosenthal (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007), 258.

31. Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *French Eighteenth-century Painters: Watteau, Boucher, Chardin, La Tour, Greuze, Fragonard* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 246-247.

32. Joshua Reynolds, *Reynolds' Discourses* (London: Walter Scott, 1887), 139.

dignity into a feminine subject.”³³

This brings us to Drouais’s *Madame de Pompadour as a Vestal Virgin*, a portrait that employs the conventions of book iconography and allegory to elevate Pompadour’s tarnished status (Fig. 26).³⁴ Here we see Louis XV’s mistress, wrapped from head to (we may assume) toe in light, swirling fabric, meekly acknowledging the viewer through her steady gaze and prominently displaying her *Book of Vestals*. Behind her right shoulder are Vesta’s eternal flame and a statue of the goddess herself, settled into the niche of a classical architectural space. Pompadour’s portrait is in keeping with the traditional eighteenth-century understanding of the vestal theme, often used by women to stress their inner character—their “*internal* make-up (taste, judgment, imagination) as well as intellectual capacity for engagement with history, literature, or mythology,” which explains Pompadour’s assumption of a dignified virgin and her book.³⁵ The *Secret History of Vestals*, an early eighteenth-century text in Pompadour’s own library, provides the basis for both the composition of Pompadour’s portrait and the admiration afforded vestals, whose sober, moral lives were comprised of a thirty-year obligation split into three ten-year intervals: 1) learning the doctrine of the cult; 2) exercising the doctrine, which included tending to Vesta’s eternal flame and performing good deeds in the community; and 3) teaching young initiates the doctrine.³⁶ For some viewers now as

33. Gill Perry, “Women in Disguise: Likeness, the Grand Style, and the Conventions of ‘Feminine’ Portraiture in the Work of Sir Joshua Reynolds,” in *Femininity and Masculinity in Eighteenth-century Art and Culture*, ed. Gill Perry and Michael Rossington (New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), 19-20.

34. Reynolds, *Discourses*, 139.

35. Nicholson, “The Ideology of Feminine ‘Virtue,’” 58.

36. *Ibid.*, 59.

then, however, the representation of Pompadour as a vestal, even though she was in real life the king's notorious mistress—a woman who was by no means a virgin—is quite ironic. Nevertheless, there is substantial evidence that around the same time as the commission of the portrait, Pompadour was trying to better her reputation, for reasons twofold—Pope Clement XIII's excommunication of the king, and her recent appointment as a lady-in-waiting to the queen, a title more acceptable than “mistress.”³⁷ Martin Schieder suggests that Pompadour “made every effort to avoid further damage to the monarch's reputation and to induce him back to a God-fearing life by leading the way herself.” Accordingly, she reportedly attended Mass much more regularly in the palace chapel, where she buried herself in a book, most likely her Book of Hours, *L'office de la sainte Vierge*, designed by Boucher in 1757 with eight New Testament scenes.³⁸ Considering Pompadour's extenuating circumstances and the moralizing nature of her portrait as a vestal, one can without doubt conclude that the portrait was intended to reverse the mistress's reputation.

Marquise du Châtelet as Urania by an unknown artist functions in a similar way (Fig. 27). Again, we see a woman disguised as a mythological character, looking up from her large volume to gaze contemplatively out at her viewer. The compass in the marquise's right hand, the instrument probably used to draw the geometric shape on the page in front of her, is one of the traditional attributes of Urania, the muse of

37. Martin Schieder, “Between *Grâce* and *Volupté*,” 71.

38. Irony again infiltrates the life of Pompadour. It is likely that Boucher based his New Testament scenes for Pompadour's Book of Hours on the corresponding scenes from the *Breviarium Parisiense* he illustrated in 1736. Boucher's illustrations for the breviary were ill-received by the patron, the Bishop Charles-Gaspard-Guillaume de Vintimille du Luc, and other clergy members for their light, picturesque nature, too frivolous for their religious context; For further reading see Schieder, “Between *Grâce* and *Volupté*,” 67-71.

Astronomy.³⁹ To the marquise's left is a large stack of books that also connotes the presence of an intellectual, someone with the knowledge only a man or a goddess (or a saint, in the Virgin Mary's case) can achieve. Although the allegorical nature of this portrait is not as heavy-handed as that of Pompadour's portrait, as the marquise wears contemporary dress and is depicted within an unidentifiable setting, it is no less representative of Reynolds's ideal portrait of a lady. Also like Madame du Pompadour, the Marquise du Châtelet had, if not a "bad" reputation, at least a dubious one. The marquise was well-written in the discipline of physics, having published in 1740 the *Institutions de Physique*, in which she "charts the relations between physics and metaphysics, and especially between Newton and Leibnitz," and also of the plight of women, as we have seen in her essay on *bonheur*.⁴⁰ Such an education would definitely have surfaced on the discerning radar of women's harshest critics such as Rousseau or Diderot. What is more, while married to the Marquis Florent-Claude du Chastellet-Lomont, the marquise had multiple lovers, including the Duc de Richelieu and famed philosopher Voltaire, both of whom fostered her interests in science and mathematics.⁴¹

Unfortunately for Madame de Pompadour and the Marquise du Châtelet, such portraits trading the domestic life of women for the intellectual realm of men and gods would certainly have been perceived by aristocratic male viewers, who were powerful and resented women's presumed usurping of their authority, as presumptuous. A deep

39. Sheriff, "The Naked Truth," 256.

40. Ibid., 255.

41. André Maurel, *The Romance of Mme. Du Châtelet and Voltaire* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1931), 40, 44.

hatred for liberated, worldly women saturated the air of eighteenth-century Europe. Mary Sheriff explains that

although on the one hand public recognition enhanced a woman's career, on the other, too much notoriety made her a target for gossips and slanderers. Only a thoroughly immodest woman would be pleased to have her name on every tongue...the most honorable woman was the one about whom the least was said.⁴²

Marie-Antoinette is the "poster-child" for the effects of a scandalously public life, as I will discuss more in depth in chapter three. At this point, however, I only hope to touch on the fact that she was criticized in the *Correspondance secrete*, equivalent to today's tabloid magazines, for even the relatively minor, but bold offenses of walking throughout Versailles's gardens alone, and for "running here and there to indulge in the dissipation so suitable to her age." By the outbreak of the revolution, the *nouvelles* had much harsher things to say about the queen's "[supposed squandering of] the revenues of the crown and [caring] nothing for the French people."⁴³ What the French people clearly feared was female influence over their monarch, a fear they had already experienced with Pompadour and then Madame du Barry's influence on Louis XV. Considering again Pompadour's portrait as a vestal, one can immediately assume how it may have been received. Although there is no known documented reaction to Pompadour's portrait as a vestal in particular, there is evidence that confirms many critics' view of the vestal allegory as, in effect, an utter sham. An essay published around 1736, *The Viciousness of Girls*, compares the ancient virgin-heroines to their then modern-day adaptations:

The praises of virginity have been recounted throughout the centuries, where this virtue always shined like a precious pearl that gives lustre and value to the chaste and virgin person; thus the Romans accorded great honor to the Virgin

42. Mary D. Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and the Cultural Politics of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 105.

43. Merrick, "Sexual Politics and Public Order," 186.

Vestals...But for the hundred girls who keep their virginity like a precious treasure, there are a thousand today who only look for occasions to lose it...[due to] *too much freedom*, idleness, seeking after pleasure...⁴⁴

The satire surrounding the vestal theme is also evident in the 1707 novel *The False Vestal or the Ungrateful Nun* whose protagonist “deals with two lovers and potentially embarrassing pregnancies.”⁴⁵ Of course, another source of satire for the vestal is that allegedly bawdy women such as Madame de Pompadour were depicted as one. Nevertheless, as the anonymous author of *The Viciousness of Girls* states, women squandered their chastity from “too much freedom” and a general disregard for their domestic responsibilities. An unnamed, irritated critic on the woman sitter and her possession of “masculine” attributes such as books comments on Maurice-Quentin de la Tour’s 1755 pastel of Pompadour in which she handles a large musical score and is surrounded by volumes of literature and a globe: “One might say that M. de la Tour was proposing to paint the portrait of a *philosophe*. Doesn’t he know that the distraction and array of details and attributes must be avoided when one wants to represent a beautiful woman? (Fig. 28)”⁴⁶ On the contrary, Vigée-Lebrun’s 1776 portrait of the Prince of Nassau depicts the very type of *philosophe*, a worldly, well-connected and -educated aristocrat accompanied by related objects, that the critic above would consider appropriate for a distinctly *male* sitter (Fig. 29). In a similar manner, the portrait of Madame du Châtelet as Urania could be compared to Pierre-Charles Baquoy’s 1795 engraving of her lover Voltaire (Fig. 30). In the engraving Voltaire is depicted, likewise, at his desk laden with the instruments of his education and success—volumes and

44. Nicholson, *The Ideology of Feminine ‘Virtue,’* 61-62.

45. *Ibid.*, 62.

46. *Ibid.*, 57.

volumes of literature, two quills and an ink pot, and a globe (which, in this particular case, probably connotes not military conquest but the practice of astronomy).⁴⁷ At any rate, both Pompadour and du Châtelet, whose portraits are a far cry from Greuze's *The Good Mother*, surface as uniquely liberated women who are seemingly unafraid to flaunt it.

This conclusion, however, is incomplete. Portraits of Madame de Pompadour and the Marquise du Châtelet would certainly have been painted with a specifically male audience in mind. The Royal Académie, presided by the conservative Comte d'Angiviller and heavily weighted with male members, gave the final word on the excellence of a painting; most commissions for portraits, despite the sitter's gender, came from male patrons; and, of course, the king himself also had an influential voice, especially on portraits of Pompadour, on what was and was not acceptable in art.⁴⁸ Certainly both Pompadour and du Châtelet wanted to conform to the male gaze.⁴⁹ Therefore, why would these two women risk upheaval by commissioning portraits in which their identities contradicted the culture's treatises on the place of woman? And how does the presence of the book both attribute masculine characteristics to the female sitters, as implied by the critic on La Tour's 1755 pastel of Pompadour, while at the same

47. Baillio, *Vigee-Lebrun*, 35-36.

48. Hyde and Milam, *Women, Art, and the Politics of Identity*, 8.

49. Patricia Simons, in her essay, "Women in Frames: The Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture," defines the male gaze in relation to profile portraits of women. She argues that "the profile, presenting an averted eye and a face available to scrutiny, was suited to the representation of an ordered, chaste, and decorous piece of property" (i.e., a woman). In Quattrocento Italy, art patrons and viewers were predominantly male, and portraits of women had to be painted accordingly. A woman looking directly at a male viewer may have been perceived as presumptuous or even connote immoral behavior. Although in eighteenth-century France, a portrait of a woman looking directly out at the viewer would not necessarily be considered immoral or out-of-line, women still had to consider the male gaze in constructing their portraits; in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary Garrard (New York: IconEditions, 1992), 39-57.

time confine them to subservient womanhood, ultimately exalting their patriarchal authorities? It is much more feasible to think of these portraits as “conjugal,” a term coined by Linda Docherty in reference to the female half of pendant portraits, despite whether the female sitters were or were not actually “conjugal” in real life.⁵⁰ Maerten van Heemskerck’s 1529 pendant portraits of Pieter Bicker and Anna Codde spare no blatancy in establishing man and woman’s respective roles (Figs. 31, 32). Here we see a woman hard at her wifely duty, spinning thread into what we can only assume is a garment for her husband or children. On the other hand, the man is depicted tending to his business accounts in a large volume, his life-line to the outside world.⁵¹ By the eighteenth century, pendant portraits became more subtle in their portrayal of social roles, but the roles are no less present.

Docherty focuses on early American portraits, but her argument is just as relevant to its French and English counterparts. She notes that

artists in America [and I would add also in Europe] have long used books as a means of characterizing women while holding the power reading implies at bay...Unable to depict literally a subjective process of engagement with specific words, painters have used books (or their equivalents) as objective signifiers of status, achievement, and morality.⁵²

Docherty employs the example of Robert Feke’s 1748 companion portraits of William and Phebe Bowdoin (Figs. 33, 34). Not schooled in complex matters or the politics of business, Phebe maintains a casual, lackadaisical interaction with her volume, “[giving]

50. By attributing a portrait of a woman as “conjugal,” Docherty means that the portrait exhibits qualities that emphasize the female sitter’s role as a devoted wife and a subscriber to society’s gendered norms, which in the eighteenth century explicitly relegated women to the domestic realm.

51. David Smith, *Masks of Wedlock: Seventeenth-century Dutch Marriage Portraits* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1982), 14.

52. Linda J. Docherty, “Women as Readers: Visual Interpretations,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 107, no. 2 (1998): 338.

no indication of actual engagement with the volume she displays,” and is immobile in her chair. William, conversely, holds a walking stick, an emblem for his masculine virility and mobility. The Bowdoin portraits fall into a tradition of “conjugal” portraiture that “sets wives in complementary relationship to their husbands,” as the supportive and domestic opposite to men’s public life, emphatic of their authority over woman.⁵³ Ultimately, the book says nothing particularly notable about Mrs. Bowdoin or other upper-class women, besides that she is of the literate upper-class and educated enough to be an acceptable match for her accomplished husband.⁵⁴

I would briefly like to apply Docherty’s theory to two non-allegorical pendant portraits of notorious wives with books, Vigée-Lebrun’s *Comtesse de la Châtre* and Joshua Reynolds’s *Emily FitzGerald, Duchess of Leinster* (Figs. 35, 36). The waywardness of the Comtesse de la Châtre, who had left her husband the Comte de la Châtre for the revolution-minded Arnail François, was thoroughly documented by the French diarist d’Espinhal:

She is amiable but very coquettish and by temperament a bit lax in her morals...She made a spectacle of herself on the Champs Elysées with the Princesse de Broglie and other of the same ilk, at the time an altar was being raised to the Fatherland for the Day of the Federation, July 14, 1790. She was pushing a wheelbarrow with her worthy sisters, not at all shocked by the language used around her which decency prevents me from repeating.⁵⁵

Not only did the comtesse leave her husband; she also made public displays of herself where women were supposed to just blend in. The Duchess of Leinster, who also had a scandalous extramarital relationship, caused equally as much chatter amongst high

53. Ibid., 342.

54. Kate Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life: Family Portraiture in Eighteenth-century England* (London: Yale University Press, 2006), 22.

55. Baillio, *Vigee-Lebrun*, 84.

society circles. The duchess had an affair with and then married after her husband's death her children's tutor, William Ogilvie, the biological father of her first son during her marriage to the duke.⁵⁶ Though extramarital relationships seem to be a trend amongst the eighteenth-century aristocracy, the comtesse and duchess failed to handle theirs with much discretion. They undoubtedly would have been scorned and even mocked by many of their peers, perpetuating their less-than-perfect reputations. We do not see any hint of this wantonness, however, in their portraits. Vigée-Lebrun depicts a lovely woman clothed in a fashionable white gown and plumed hat, infused with an air of dignity. Although Vigée-Lebrun did not paint a male counterpart for our comparison, the comtesse is portrayed within an interior setting, entrenched upon a sofa, and leisurely holding her place with her right thumb in a small book. Just as Mrs. Bowdoin, the comtesse interacts little if at all with the book, and fulfills her proper domestic obligation. Likewise, Reynolds presents the Duchess of Leinster within an interior space, the window to the world behind her, and contemplatively gazing off to the side. She holds her place in a small book with her left forefinger, but is completely disengaged with it. In comparison to Reynolds's portrait of the duke, clad in his gentleman's clothing, standing in an outside space, and pointing to his Irish estate in the distance, the duchess's portrait is all the more conjugal in nature (Fig. 37).⁵⁷

If we reexamine the portraits of Pompadour and du Châtelet under these auspices, they, too, become conjugal. Concerning Pompadour as a vestal, it was no secret that

56. Brian Fitzgerald, *Emily Duchess of Leinster 1731-1814: A Study of Her Life and Times* (London: Staples Press, 1949), 146.

57. Retford, *Art of Domestic Life*, 38.

vestals were dedicated to the cult of Vesta, the Roman goddess of the home, more specifically the domestic hearth. Most notably, the chief high priest of her cult lorded paternal authority over all of the vestal virgins.⁵⁸ Drouais has, thus, depicted Madame de Pompadour as a woman dedicated to the home, and also willingly subject to male authority. Diderot's comment on the popularity of the vestal theme further instills virtue into Pompadour's portrait:

It's because they presuppose youth, charm, modesty, innocence, and dignity; it is because these qualities, rendered according to the models of antiquity, are joined by ancillary ideas of the temple, the altar, meditations, withdrawal, and the sacred...it is because a vestal is a being at once historical, poetical, and moral.⁵⁹

If one did not know any better, one could easily mistake Diderot's description of a vestal for that of the Virgin Mary, undoubtedly another added dimension of morality for the portrait. Furthermore, du Châtelet as Urania functions in the same way. Urania is in Greek mythology one of the nine muses, the muse of astrology. As the chief high priest lorded over the vestals, so did Apollo over the muses.⁶⁰ As a result, du Châtelet also appears as a woman under the authority of a man. What at first is perceived as possible deviance from the gendered prescription for women in the two women's allegorical portraits, upon further investigation, is more likely two women conceding to gendered norms.

The de Goncourt brothers describe in one of their books a retrospective of the eighteenth-century woman:

[She] was the governing principle, the directing reason and the commanding voice of the eighteenth century. She was the universal and fatal cause, the origin of

58. Pierre Grimal, *Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (New York: Blackwell, 1986), 465.

59. Nicholson, "The Ideology of Feminine 'Virtue,'" 58.

60. Grimal, *Dictionary*, 297-98.

events, the source of things. She presided over Time, like the Fortune of her history. Nothing escaped her; within her grasp she held the King and France, the will of the sovereign and the authority of public opinion—everything. She gave orders at court, she was the mistress in her home. She held the revolutions of alliances and political systems, peace and war, the literature, the arts and the fashions of the eighteenth century, as well as its destinies, in the folds of her gown; she bent them to her whim or to her passions.⁶¹

After examining the portraits of Madame de Pompadour, the Marquise du Châtelet, Comtesse de la Châtre, and the Duchess of Leinster, however, one can recognize the de Goncourts' panegyric as an out-and-out romanticizing of woman's role in society. Eighteenth-century women used both allegorical and non-allegorical portraiture to construct for themselves an identity that to the public presented them as subservient to their husbands or immediate patriarch. Contrary to popular belief, women used books to ennoble their portraits not to surpass the authority of their husbands but simply to promote themselves as suitable companions for their distinguished husbands. For especially allegorical portraits, woman "could safely question her conventional place in the social order...[without] appearing deviant."⁶² The four women sitters I have discussed in this chapter actually assume, in their portraits if nowhere else, the female role assigned by Rousseau, Diderot, and other traditionalists, and thus embrace their secondary position, behind men, within the social hierarchy. Ultimately, these four women emerge in their portraits as moral, elevated, and socially acceptable only because of their immediate association with and support of their patriarchs.

61. Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *The Woman of the Eighteenth Century: Her Life, from Birth to Death, Her Love and Her Philosophy in the Worlds of Salon, Shop, and Street* (New York: Minton, Balch & Co., 1927), 243.

62. Sheriff, "The Naked Truth," 258.

CHAPTER THREE

THE EDUCATION OF MARIE-ANTOINETTE: MARIAN ALLEGORY AND THE BOOK IN VIGÉE-LEBRUN'S *MARIE-ANTOINETTE EN ROBE DE VELOURS BLEU*

Stiff-backed imperial soldiers fired salvos from the ramparts; church bells pealed gaily throughout the city. Their voices raised above the din, court officials harangued the travelers and onlookers in German, French, Latin. *Bella gerant alii, tu Austria felix nube...* It was the Hapsburg family motto, and [Marie-Antoinette's] mother had repeated it to her often enough in recent months: 'Let other nations wage war; you, happy Austria, achieve your ends through marriage.'¹

Marie-Antoinette's fate changed forever on April 21, 1770, the day her mother Empress Maria-Theresa promised her as the future-wife of France's Louis-Auguste, the teenage boy who would become Louis XVI.² All at once, the Austrian princess became a bargaining chip within a very complex alliance between two famously patriarchal empires—the Hapsburgs and the Bourbons. Marie-Antoinette lost everything she had ever known—her Austrian homeland, her close-knit family, and her childhood nickname, Antoine; she was now the French *dauphine*, the future king's wife and his loyal subject. Thrust into the unfriendly environment of Versailles and its courtiers, struggling for acceptance and a new identity to accompany her new position, Marie-Antoinette turned to the only place she could, the place to which so many women before her had turned—portraiture.

Feminist scholars Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam point out the care with which a prominent female sitter must construct her identity in visual culture:

All women, but especially those in the public eye, had to be exceedingly careful and attentive to the image they presented if they wished to function in society. All had to think carefully about how they defined themselves

1. Caroline Weber, *Queen of Fashion: What Marie-Antoinette Wore to the Revolution* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 11.

2. Ibid., 11-12.

and who they wanted to (appear) to be. The range of choices they made when it came to pictorial representations of themselves is telling and illuminating about the individual women and the time in which they lived.³

Accordingly, over the course of about thirteen years, the queen and her court portraitist Elisabeth-Louise Vigée-Lebrun forged a patron-artist partnership to promote a strong pictorial programme that asserted the queen as virtuous, moral, and, above all, the king's loyal wife. As Marie-Antoinette's reputation diminished amongst the French people, the programme centered upon a particularly virtuous theme—the imagery of the Virgin Mary. One of the very last paintings the queen commissioned from her favorite portraitist is *Marie-Antoinette en Robe de Velours Bleu*, a portrait that effectively channels the Virgin through various attributes, not least the book in the queen's hand (Fig. 1). Vigée-Lebrun, attempting to counteract the queen's reputation as a dominating and even promiscuous woman, employed the allegorical figure of the Virgin Mary, and thereby created an identity for Marie-Antoinette that defines her expressly as the faithful wife of the king.

Vigée-Lebrun's portrait of Marie-Antoinette presents a voluptuous female figure in a seated position, her body creating an s-curve. She wears a multiple-strand pearl necklace and is formally, but reservedly, dressed in a simple navy and cream gown with a lace collar around the neck and fur trim around the bottom hem. The most elaborate and feminine element of her costume is the headdress, constructed of a matching navy toque and “ornamental plumes”—three feathers sprouting from the cream ribbon border, which flows down the figure's back. The sitter lightly rests her left arm on a pillow upon a table, both the pillow and table covered with a luxurious, deep scarlet velvet fabric,

3. Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam, eds., *Women, Art, and Politics of Identity in Eighteenth-century Europe* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2003), 7-8.

embroidered with gold thread. The same scarlet fabric is repeated in the chair upholstery and in the plush cushion on which the woman supports her feet. Also on the table is a bouquet of flowers in a silver vase surrounded by other loose flowers, and in the far right periphery of the portrait's surface is a jeweled crown, so marginal it is almost imperceptible. The setting of the portrait is stately and austere, two monumental columns behind the sitter's right shoulder, a grand entryway defined on one side by a slender Ionic column behind her left shoulder, and a dark curtain cascading across the top right corner of the portrait. The most fascinating characteristics of the entire portrait are the sitter's calm, direct gaze toward the viewer, and the leather-bound, partially opened book in the sitter's right hand. The scarlet-colored book is slightly brighter than the fabrics of the table, cushions, and chair, and thus emphasized visually over them.

Minus the crown, Vigée-Lebrun's *Marie-Antoinette* could be mistaken for any aristocratic woman sitting for her portrait. However, when one knows that the sitter is Marie Antoinette, the viewer immediately recognizes that the queen of France in courtly dress does not inhabit just any room, but a room at Versailles, the very symbol of Louis XIV and the legacy of absolute monarchy so synonymous with the *ancien regime*. The symbols of the monarchy then become obvious, such as the royal blue of her dress, the majestic crown of the Bourbon family, the plush cushion embroidered with the fleur-de-lys, and the Bourbon-Hapsburg coat of arms embroidered onto the red velvet tablecloth and the cover of the book Marie-Antoinette holds.⁴ The book itself, the central focus of the portrait, has its own connotations, "indicating her serious interests," or her intellectual

4. Joseph Baillio, *Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, 1755-1842* (Fort Worth: Kimbell Art Museum, 1982), 78.

consciousness, as Gita May suggests.⁵ While a book often signifies worldly learnedness, here, paired with Marie-Antoinette and the surrounding royal symbols, it more likely represents a learnedness associated explicitly with the court. The book sets up its queenly sitter as the product of a very particular education fit for a queen and all that that implies—an education completely based on the fulfillment of the wifely task of supporting her husband. As we will see, however, Marie-Antoinette’s lived experience departs significantly from her “domesticized” education and the ideal of the devoted wife and mother presented in the *Velours Bleu* portrait. The wife of a relatively weak, unassertive king who failed to grasp the concept of the divine god-king established by his great-great-great-grandfather, Louis XIV, Marie-Antoinette found herself in a less-than-desirable position—the position of a queen whose subjects perceived her as a usurper of the king’s authority. As the evidence will show, the *Velours Bleu* portrait was commissioned by the queen to reconcile two facets of her life completely at odds, the life she was educated to live, as an obedient and devoted wife, and the life she actually lived, as the wife of a weak king to whom unfailing obedience and devotion was difficult to exhibit.

From childhood, little Antoine was groomed for wifedom. Antonia Fraser’s extensive biography of Marie-Antoinette sheds much light on the queen’s upbringing. Generally, the expectations for princesses’ education in the eighteenth century were not especially demanding, but the expectations for Antoine’s were far below even that. Her tutor, the Countess Brandeis, was very fond of the archduchess and spoiled her so much

5. Gita May, *Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun: The Odyssey of an Artist in an Age of Revolution* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005), 40.

that she neglected the child's literary education altogether.⁶ Instead, Antoine and her sisters were schooled in the arts of "[appearing] and [performing] gracefully at court events." Their team of instructors was comprised of veritable "all-stars" in music and dance—Christoph Gluck, Georg Wagenseil, Joseph Stephan, Johann Adolph Hasse, and two English harpsichord players, Marianne and Cecelia Davies. Rather than reading and writing, Marie-Antoinette was known to shine at dancing and reading music even as an adult.⁷ Her disinclination for intellectual subjects, Fraser presumes, is likely based on the fact that her bossy older sister Marie-Christine was capable of reading well and concentrating on more serious matters.⁸ Intimidated by the company of her intellectual sister and under-developed in the art of "serious" concentration, Antoine fit perfectly the stereotype Rousseau posed for little girls: "After all, why should a little girl know how to read and write? Has she a house to manage? Most of them make a bad use of this fatal knowledge, and girls are so full of curiosity that few of them will fail to learn without compulsion."⁹ Maria-Teresa's input toward her daughters' education consisted of preaching to them the virtues of obedience to their husbands and acceptance of their imminent marriages to princes and prelates. Perhaps Maria-Teresa's condoned Antoine's cultivated appearance of lackluster wit and intelligence because it failed to compete with her number one priority for her daughters—that they would appear submissive to their

6. Antonia Fraser, *Marie-Antoinette: The Journey* (New York: Random House, 2001), 32.

7. *Ibid.*, 20.

8. *Ibid.*, 23.

9. Jane English, *Sex Equality* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 46.

husbands. Of her daughters, the empress proclaimed, “They are born to obey and must learn to do so in good time.”¹⁰

When Marie-Antoinette became of marrying age, the archduchess played perfectly into Maria-Teresa’s designs on building an alliance between two “perennial enemies,” Austria and France.¹¹ Since the War of the Austrian Succession, in which France supported Prussia, Austria’s “hereditary” enemy, France and Austria had been in dispute. However, just seven years after the war had ended, when Prussia signed a treaty with England, France’s long-time enemy, solidifying a union between the two countries, the governments of Austria and France saw it in both their interests to join forces. The marriage between the Austrian sweetheart and the Dauphin of France was contrived to finalize the terms of the Treaty of Paris first begun in 1756.¹² At last, in 1770 Marie-Antoinette did what she had been trained her entire life to do—she married a prince. Once at Versailles and after she assumed the position of queen, Marie-Antoinette was under the rule of Salic Law, a seemingly archaic edict exercised only in France, which underscored all that she had been taught by her mother. One of Salic Law’s main principles was based on Guy Coquille’s 1588 *Institution au droict de François*, stating: “The king is monarch and has no companion in his royal majesty. External honors can be communicated to the wives of kings, but that which is of his majesty, representing his power and dignity, resides inextricably in his person alone.”¹³ Salic Law’s purpose is quite clear: to prohibit succession of the throne to the queen.

10. Fraser, *Marie-Antoinette*, 14.

11. Joseph Baillio, *Vigée-Lebrun*, 61.

12. Weber, *Queen of Fashion*, 12.

13. Mary D. Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and the Cultural Politics of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 150.

However, much to the contrary of the principles of Salic Law, and also the ideal of the god-king instituted by Louis XIV, in his real life Louis XVI failed to embody the powerful, almighty persona of the patriarchal king as seen in his regal and stately portrait completed by Callet in 1788 (Fig. 38). That the confident, self-assured king in Callet's portrait is quite the antithesis of the king's actual nature is a visual attestation to portraiture's ability to create an identity, perhaps otherwise unknown to the public, for a sitter, as seen also in Vigée-Lebrun's *Velours Bleu* portrait. On Louis XVI's weakness, Fraser comments:

Louis XVI was an honorable and conscientious young man, but even those who wished him well referred to his indecisiveness, the need for a stronger nature to dominate him, a relic no doubt of the lack of confidence inculcated during his unloved childhood. Furthermore there is no evidence that he had been prepared by his grandfather to be 'the master.'¹⁴

To add insult to injury, the king was rumored to be impotent—the ultimate emasculation of emasculations—for some time after his marriage to Marie-Antoinette, a rumor which may be substantiated by the fact that their marriage was not consummated until 1773, three years after their wedding. The Bourbon family physician Count d'Aranda described Louis XVI as having “a certain impediment which prevented [him] being [a husband],” in the physical sense.¹⁵ Although the king and queen finally consummated their marriage, the incident was humiliating for Marie-Antoinette who was endlessly chided for her inability to arouse her husband. Clearly, Louis XVI “could never become the kind of strong dominant husband worthy of respect close to reverence, which Marie-

14. Fraser, *Marie-Antoinette*, 124.

15. *Ibid.*, 107.

Antoinette had been taught in Vienna to expect.”¹⁶ Furthermore, Louis XVI had no official mistresses as his grandfather before him, who entertained the likes of Madame de Pompadour and Madame du Barry. The *Memoire secrets*, for example, spoke of a particular evening in 1779 when Louis XVI had to dine without his wife. Disregarding the seducing gaze of a female onlooker, the king was exalted as “[taking] no mistress other than Truth.”¹⁷

As a result of his fidelity and his alleged weaknesses, Marie-Antoinette’s influence over him was “undiluted” by the opinions of other confidantes, positioning her as a transgressing, dominant woman in the eyes of other courtiers.¹⁸ At first, the new queen seemed to steward her power well. She was her husband’s loyal sidekick in trying to restore morality and respect to the monarchy after Louis XV’s rumored campaign of debauchery. For instance, she prohibited the performance of plays starring the wayward actress Mademoiselle Hus at Fontainebleau, “[cooperating] with her august husband in the preservation of decency and morality.”¹⁹ However, the “honeymoon” with the public did not last for long. Being the daughter of an Austrian empress and the wife of a French king presented Marie-Antoinette with the task of careful political maneuvering that did not exactly fit the prescription for a submissive, dutiful wife. Marie-Antoinette, “somewhat in the position of a modern spy,” was diplomatically instructed by her mother at all times. She continually reported back to her mother through letters, one in which

16. Ibid., 107, 456.

17. Jeffrey Merrick, “Sexual Politics and Public Order in Late 18th c. France: The *Mémoires secrets* and the *Correspondance secrete*,” in *Forbidden History: The State, Society, and the Regulation of Sexuality in Modern Europe*, ed., John C. Fout (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 184.

18. Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman*, 157.

19. Merrick, “Sexual Politics and Public Order,” 185.

she declared her undying devotion to the empress: “I shall be only too happy to contribute to the union [of the two families] and to prove to my dear mother the deference and loving respect which I shall accord to her all her life.”²⁰ Marie-Antoinette, thus, defended her homeland whenever possible, such as in the Counsel of State, the legislative body to which she eventually acquired considerable access.²¹ At the same time as she took more interest in the Counsel of State and other political affairs than Louis XVI did, she also surpassed his interest in social affairs. The queen hosted countless parties, balls, and banquets for her fellow-courtiers. She indulged in quintessential feminine toilette practices—heavy makeup, expensive garments, and elaborate hair coiffures, and also frivolous games, such as gambling and cards. She quickly earned herself the nickname “Madame Déficit” by, according to popular belief, “[squandering] the revenues of the crown and [caring] nothing for the French people.”²² The queen was largely perceived by French society as the “front-man” of women liberated, so much that in his twentieth-century article “Terrorizing Marie-Antoinette,” co-written with Jennifer Curtiss Gage, Pierre Saint-Amand designates the fear of the advancement of women as the “Marie-Antoinette Syndrome.”²³ Moreover, her contemporary feminist writers found in her a political ally. Olympe de Gouges dedicated her *Declaration of the Rights of Woman*, and Madame de Montaclos the first issue of the *Journal des Dames* after its five-year suspension to the queen, and even Vigée-Lebrun enjoyed the power of the queen who

20. Fraser, *Marie-Antoinette*, 100.

21. Baillio, *Vigée-Lebrun*, 62.

22. Merrick, “Sexual Politics and Public Order,” 184, 186.

23. Pierre Saint-Amand and Jennifer Curtiss Gage, “Terrorizing Marie Antoinette,” *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 3 (Spring, 1994): 379.

expedited the artist's acceptance into the Academie.²⁴ In the visual arts, Marie-Antoinette had herself depicted literally "wearing the pants in the family" in 1771 when she had taken up the "masculine" sports of horseback riding and hunting (Fig. 39). Though praised by her riding mentor Louis XV, the then dauphine received harsh criticism for "[abandoning] the long, flowing skirts of the sidesaddle rider for the slim breeches—and the straddled mount—of a man."²⁵ In addition, the image of a sitter horseback riding was dangerously close to traditional kings' portraiture, often depicting them courageously riding into battle.²⁶

In realistic terms, however, the queen had no specific interest, nor motive, for pursuing the rights of woman. Her seemingly dominating nature over Louis XVI in both political and social arenas was less to do with the advancement of woman, including herself, and more likely tied to the advancement of Austria, a desire held by her empress-mother, but not necessarily by the French queen herself.²⁷ Indeed, Marie-Antoinette was becoming a bit too assertive in the eyes of French society, but some aspects of her private life indicate her awareness of this negative publicity, and her desire to combat it. The queen is reported to have read Rousseau avidly, and adopted his "romantic ideal of a plain, rustic, unadorned way of life" of peasants.²⁸ Though he railed in his writings against extravagant lifestyles and in particular the impropriety of women flaunting

24. Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman*, 175-176.

25. Weber, *Queen of Fashion*, 80-81.

26. Ibid., 82.

27. Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman*, 169.

28. May, *Vigée-Lebrun*, 59.

themselves in public, Rousseau was, ironically, quite fashionable amongst courtiers at Versailles.²⁹ At first, she used her *jardin anglais* outside the Petit Trianon to meditate and find tranquility.³⁰ When it was no longer enough, she commissioned a model peasant village complete with cottages and a dairy farm. There, the queen dressed in a shepherdess costume based on the versions in the paintings of Boucher and Fragonard (Fig. 40).³¹ Her adoption of Rousseau's principles culminated in her 1783 portrait by Vigée-Lebrun, *Marie-Antoinette en Chemise* (Fig. 41). Here, the queen of France has shed her ceremonial regalia for a lighter, more casual look—she wears a white muslin gown and a broad-brimmed hat. Vigée-Lebrun, a Rousseau-ist herself, was excited to finally portray the queen “not merely as an impersonal symbol of royalty, but as a woman in all her appealing and vulnerable femininity.”³² The artist, who very much disliked powdered hair and hoopskirts, begged the queen's permission to paint her without powdered or decorated hair and typical royal dress. Given their amicable relationship, the queen agreed to the *en chemise* look.³³

The faux-natural quality of the portrait, however, backfired twofold. At the Salon of 1783, critics were appalled by the impropriety of the queen of France pictured in such

29. Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman*, 109.

30. The *jardin anglais* was cultivated to appear more naturalistic, and thus conformed to Rousseau's preference for a less formal, manicured garden, than the rest of the Italian-style gardens at Versailles; Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1919), 275-176.

31. May, *Vigée-Lebrun*, 61-63.

32. *Ibid.*, 39.

33. Elisabeth-Louise Vigée-Lebrun, *Memoirs of Madame Vigée Lebrun* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1989), 22.

an informal, even lingerie-esque garment.³⁴ If the portrait was meant to present the queen as a natural, un-frivolous, subscriber to Rousseau, it did not work. First of all, in reality the muslin fabric imported from England was very pricy, a “luxury” item that a true peasant woman would never wear.³⁵ The pitiable existence of the working class was a reality that courtiers, who spent ridiculous amounts of money on “sumptuous garments, woven with gold and silver, their carriages, liveries, hunting, and entertainments, for show and pleasure,” could never fully grasp despite any model peasant villages.³⁶ Secondly, in regard to the muslin gown, the Salon audience thought Marie-Antoinette might as well have been portrayed in her undergarments or even nude due to the translucent quality of the fabric.³⁷ The portrait, in conjunction with a series of unfounded rumors, triggered a general popular disgust with the queen and the flaunting of her body. By making herself the focus of the masses as the fashion-plate of Versailles (and by her general indulgence in material riches), Marie-Antoinette, intentionally or otherwise, sexualized herself, becoming the “negative heroine of a multitude of pornographic scenarios,” only loosely based on reality, but to the angry, financially burdened public, the gap between reality and rumor became nonexistent.³⁸ Obviously, viewers neither understood nor interpreted from the portrait the message that Vigée-Lebrun and Marie-Antoinette had intended—that their queen was natural, down-to-earth, and completely unfrivolous, a true sympathizer of the common people. Instead, Marie-Antoinette was

34. Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman*, 143-45.

35. Ibid., 145.

36. Albert Mathiez, *The French Revolution* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), 5-6.

37. Vigée-Lebrun, *Memoirs*, 26.

38. Saint-Amand and Gage, “Terrorizing,” 391.

perceived as a royal harlot, whose alleged promiscuity was adopted as a symbol of “contagious perversion” in sometimes vulgar, other times just humiliating caricatures published in widely circulated pamphlets (Fig. 42). In the caricatures, a far cry from the Marian imagery I will discuss below in *Marie-Antoinette en Robe de Velours Bleu*, the queen is depicted as an unsightly beast, a “veritable laboratory of visual experimentations, a distorted icon.”³⁹

Whether the negative reception of *Marie-Antoinette en Chemise* directly impacted the drastic transformation of setting and dress from the *En Chemise* to the *Velours Bleu* portraits is uncertain, but to deny it had any impact opposes all the evidence. It must be acknowledged that the latter portrait was not the first occasion when Vigée-Lebrun employed Marian imagery to boost the public image of the queen, who, like her imperial sisters, was named in honor of the Virgin Mary. The first such portrait, according to Joseph Baillio, was *Marie-Antoinette and Her Children*, the painting to which, after its debut at the Salon of 1787, the *Velours Bleu* portrait was conceived in response (Fig. 43).⁴⁰ After a minor surgical procedure on Louis XVI’s part, the queen finally became pregnant with a daughter, Madame Royale Marie-Therese, in 1778. By 1787, the royal couple had three more children—the Dauphin Louis-Joseph, Louis-Charles, and Sophie-Beatrice, all four of whom we see in the portrait except for little Sophie.⁴¹ The absence of Sophie, indicated by the Dauphin’s pointing to the empty cradle, is what makes this portrait particularly striking and quite tragic at the same time, reminding the viewing of

39. Ibid., 392-393.

40. Baillio, *Vigée-Lebrun*, 80.

41. Ibid., 62.

the recent death of the queen's youngest child.⁴² Vigée-Lebrun was no sentimental fool; she knew exactly what imagery should be used to evoke a sympathetic reaction from the queen's critics—that of motherhood. Hyde and Milam discuss the popularity of “themes of domesticity and maternity” and how they were “frequently favored by women in their representations during this period.”⁴³ As discussed in both Chapters One and Two in regard to women's domestic responsibilities, motherhood was central to a woman's identity, and without it, women were perceived as incomplete and lacking in their domestic responsibilities.⁴⁴ *Marie-Antoinette and Her Children* was certainly intended to accentuate the queen's family values and maternal instinct, so valued by Rousseau and his followers, by an iconographic composition of the Virgin and Child.⁴⁵ Indeed, the painting bears an uncanny resemblance to one of Rembrandt's well-known *Holy Family* scenes, a painting Vigée-Lebrun most certainly would have seen in the royal collection (Fig. 44). Not only is the cradle imagery a direct link between the two paintings, but the presence of St. Anne and the book clearly references Education of the Virgin scenes, such as the ones I discussed in Chapter One. Furthermore, Hyde and Milam argue that, surely, Vigée-Lebrun, Marie-Antoinette, and her ladies-in-waiting all hoped that the

42. Vigée-Lebrun, *Memoirs*, 29-30.

43. Hyde and Milam, *Women, Art, and the Politics of Identity*, 10.

44. Ibid.

45. May, *Vigée-Lebrun*, 60; Rousseau is known for his insistence that mother and child have as much direct contact as possible. For example, in *Émile* he supports women's breastfeeding of their own children, but, on the other hand, looks down upon women, largely of the aristocracy, who hire nurses to breastfeed their children. He posits, “But should the question be envisaged only from the physical side, and does the child have less need of a mother's care than of her breast?” He continues: “There is no substitute for maternal solicitude. She who nurses another's child in place of her own is a bad mother. How will she be a good nurse? She could become one, but slowly; habit would have to change nature; and the child, ill cared for, will have the time to perish a hundred times before his nurse has gained a mother's tenderness for him”; Rousseau, *Émile, or On Education* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 45.

portrait would deflect the nasty gossip circulating about the queen.⁴⁶ Gita May admits that the flattering portrait has generally been seen as a “deliberate attempt to change the queen’s public image” by “combining the *bourgeois* ideal of maternal bliss with the image of absolute monarchy.”⁴⁷ *Marie-Antoinette and Her Children* received mixed reviews from its viewers, however. Obviously, on some level, it did enjoy a level of success. According to Baillio, the Marquis de Sombreuil, Governor of the Invalides commissioned the *Velours Bleu* portrait after viewing *Marie-Antoinette and Her Children*, and Vigée-Lebrun herself remarks in her *Memoirs* that the portrait was generally welcomed by its contemporary audience in 1787, probably because of its maternal quality.⁴⁸ On the other hand, Vigée-Lebrun also notes that revolutionary-minded viewers would say, “That’s how the money goes,” and that by 1789, when the revolution actually broke out, it would certainly have been destroyed at Versailles had Marie-Antoinette not removed it because it reminded her of Sophie’s death.⁴⁹

Building upon even the fewest positive responses to *Marie-Antoinette and Her Children*, Vigée-Lebrun seems to have painted *Marie-Antoinette en Robe de Velours Bleu* with an even stronger association to the Virgin Mary than the former portrait. Vigée-Lebrun’s employment of an imposing architectural space, the queen’s blue dress, and her attributes of a white rose and a book in *Marie-Antoinette en Robe de Velours Bleu* unmistakably presents a sitter who is based on the visual tradition of the Virgin Mary, and who is also enveloped, in theory, by the patriarchal authority of her husband-king. I

46. May, *Vigée-Lebrun*, 3.

47. Hyde and Milam, *Women, Art, and the Politics of Identity*, 166.

48. Vigée-Lebrun, *Memoirs*, 29-30.

49. *Ibid.*

would like to begin by analyzing the architectural space surrounding the queen. Upon studying Jean-Marie Pérouse de Montclos's visual guide to Versailles, I have concluded that the room in which Marie-Antoinette sits is based on, though artistically altered from, a vestibule located near the series of historical rooms on the ground floor of the southern wing (Fig. 45). The vestibule contains the same double-columns, the squared arch, and the sculptural frieze behind the queen in the portrait. Though the significance of this particular room is unknown, simply that it is in Versailles is enough to suggest the king's authority over Marie-Antoinette. After all, Louis XIV, the king under whom the palace was built, systematically established Versailles as the very symbol for patriarchal authority through a very elaborate pictorial programme.⁵⁰ Dubbing himself the "sun king," a title both associated with Apollo and certainly intended to be inherited by his successors, Louis XIV instructed his architects to cover the grounds of Versailles with images of Apollo, ever reminding visitors that the palace was the domain of the king.⁵¹ Furthermore, though we cannot see the capitals of the columns behind her in the portrait, judging by a photograph of the vestibule we can infer that the columns behind Marie-Antoinette are Tuscan, a variation of the Doric order attributed by Vitruvius as "[exhibiting] the proportions, strength and beauty of the body of man."⁵² On the other hand, behind the queen's left shoulder is a much smaller, daintier column, a variation of the Ionic order, whose volute is nearly covered by the drape. The Ionic order, also according to Vitruvius, exhibits features of a woman, its volutes resembling the curls of a

50. Guy Walton, *Louis XIV's Versailles* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 35.

51. *Ibid.*, 80.

52. Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1960), 103-104; Dr. Fred Albertson recognized the columns in the *Velours Bleu* portrait as Tuscan.

woman's hair, and flutes the folds in a woman's dress.⁵³ Could it be that Vigée-Lebrun has set Marie-Antoinette in this room precisely because its architectural language juxtaposes the austere power of man and the weaker nature of woman in the respective columns? Most importantly, the territory of the French king in Vigée-Lebrun's portrait certainly aligns with the territory of the heavenly King, the Temple, in Murillo's *St. Anne Teaching the Virgin to Read* in the artists' use of classical architecture (Fig. 7). Where Marie-Antoinette is literally enveloped in patriarchal authority, so is the Virgin. Beginning as early as the sixteenth century, artists, such as Pieter Aertsen in his *Kitchen Maid* of 1583, often juxtaposed their sitters against classical architecture in order to create an "organic connection" between the two. Within their similar contexts of representing an environment of masculine authority, both Murillo's and Vigée-Lebrun's paintings can be read, indeed, as depicting two female figures "organically connected" to their immediate male authorities through the strong, stable quality of classical architecture.⁵⁴ The placement of the Virgin and Marie-Antoinette within such a space supports their respective roles in the fulfillment of God's plan through the Messiah, and in the creating of a patriarchal public image of King Louis XVI.

Besides utilizing the architectural space to suggest a holy ambience, Vigée-Lebrun also borrowed from Marian imagery the blue garment of the Virgin and also her frequently accompanying botanical motif, two attributes that function somewhat as double-agents to emphasize Marie-Antoinette as subject to both God and her husband-king. On one hand, blue, the international color for royalty, has been depicted on the

53. Ibid., 104.

54. Reindert Falkenburg, "Pieter Aertsen's *Kitchen Maid* in Brussels: A Peek Into the Kitchen of Art," in *Living in Posterity: Essays in Honour of Bart Westerweel*, ed., J. F. van Dijkhuizen, P. G. Hoftijzer, and J. Roding (Hilversum: Uitg. Verloren, 2004), 95.

Virgin Mary, the queen of heaven, for centuries. For example, in the fifteenth-century, Rogier van der Weyden clad the swooning Virgin in a brilliant blue in his *Deposition* altarpiece, and even before that, Giotto frequently dressed his Madonnas in blue (Figs. 46, 47). Just over two centuries later, Murillo painted the Virgin in his *St. Anne Teaching the Virgin to Read* draped with a blue shawl. By the eighteenth century, blue was still en vogue for the Virgin, as we can see in Boucher's *Virgin and Child* from ca. 1765, in which sumptuous blue fabric swaddles the intimate couple (Fig. 48). Holding the connotations of the Virgin in all her regal, holy presence, Marie-Antoinette in her blue dress would certainly emit a nearly equal one. On the other hand, blue is also one of the Bourbon family colors. Therefore, on the queen of France, blue at once becomes a reference to the sitter's connections both with the Virgin's queenship and with the willing espousal of the monarchy. In addition, the vase of flowers on the table next to the queen includes one very prominent white rose, another common attribute of the Virgin. In fact, the *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* defines the rose without thorns as the "designation of the Virgin Mary...[her] love, compassion, and charity in Christian art."⁵⁵ In the late fifteenth century, Sandro Botticelli painted an image of the Madonna and Child, a painting Vigée-Lebrun may have seen in the royal collection, offset by a garden of red and yellow roses behind them (Fig. 49). His painting reminds us that the rose and other botanical motifs are inherently tied to the *hortus conclusus*, an enclosed garden that is a metaphor for the Virgin's chastity.⁵⁶ *Marie-Antoinette en Robe de Velours Bleu* is certainly not the first portrait of the queen to employ the botanical motif. In two painted

55. Donald McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 243.

56. Reindert Falkenburg, *The Fruit of Devotion: Mysticism and the Imagery of Love in Flemish Paintings of the Virgin and Child* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Pub., 1994), 11.

by Vigée-Lebrun in 1783, one being *Marie-Antoinette en Chemise*, the sitter holds a rose presumably picked from the gardens of Versailles; the other also depicts the queen holding a rose in the gardens of Versailles, but her attire is much more formal (Fig. 50). Nearly ten years earlier Jacques-Fabien Gautier d'Agoty painted the queen dressed in a gown literally covered in white lilies, a traditional symbol the Virgin's purity used also in Robert Campin's *Merode Triptych* from ca. 1425 (Figs. 51, 52). However, just as the color blue, the white lily is also intrinsically tied to the Bourbon family, a symbol on its coat-of-arms, the *fleur-de-lys*. Though some might conjecture that the classical architecture, the blue dress, and the white flower may, separately, only allude to Marie-Antoinette's connection to the Bourbon dynasty, the three elements altogether in one portrait, *Marie-Antoinette en Robe de Velours Bleu*, connect the queen to the Virgin, a point only strengthened by the inclusion of the book.

Finally, the book holds more significance than any other attribute in the portrait, because it communicates to the viewer the presence of a virtuous, subservient woman on three different levels. First of all, the book connotes the sitter's own education, as does the book in the Education of the Virgin; both women were educated for very particular roles and in direct relation to man. Marie-Antoinette, as mentioned previously, underwent a childhood education that by no means prepared her for the life of an intellect or *philosophe*, but for an explicitly domestic life, one devoted to home and husband. On another level, we could view the book as a vital element to a companion portrait, much like Robert Feke's portraits of William and Phebe Bowdoin I discussed in chapter two. If we compare this portrait of the queen with Callet's portrait of Louis XVI, we can literally see the queen recede into wifedom. The most striking qualities of the portraits together

are that the king stands confidently and powerfully, poised for whatever the world may hold, and the queen is seated, immobile in her chair, poised for leisurely reading rather than military conquests. At once, Marie-Antoinette becomes one of the wives Kate Retford describes as not particularly noteworthy (the opposite of the woman we see in *Marie-Antoinette en Chemise*), and educated not for her own endeavors but simply to be an acceptable companion for her husband.⁵⁷ Lastly, and most importantly, the book connotes the imagery of the Education of the Virgin scenes. As I discussed in Chapter One, often times the book the Virgin holds in these scenes alludes directly to Old Testament scripture which prefigures the Virgin's vital role in fulfilling God's design of sending his holy son, Jesus Christ, to become flesh and save humanity from their sins. Only through her association with the great patriarch, God himself, does the Virgin have any identity of her own whatsoever. Similarly, only through her association with the great patriarch of France, King Louis XVI, can Marie-Antoinette assert any importance or authority, at least in her portrait. Furthermore, what concretely links Marie-Antoinette to the Virgin is that the book she holds is very probably a Bible. In a portrait painted (possibly posthumously, as the queen was guillotined in 1793) by the Marquise de Bréhan sometime between 1793 and 1795, the deposed queen is depicted in her mourning clothes after the execution of Louis XVI (Fig. 53).⁵⁸ To her left is a bust of the deceased king, and behind her is the sterile interior of what appears to be the Temple prison, indicated by the bars on the window to the left, the final "home" of both Marie-

57. Kate Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life: Family Portraiture in Eighteenth-century England* (London: Yale University Press, 2006), 22.

58. Weber, *Queen of Fashion*, Plate 24 caption.

Antoinette and Louis XVI.⁵⁹ In Marie-Antoinette's right hand is the very same book we see in *Marie-Antoinette en Robe de Velours Bleu*—a thin, red, leather-bound volume with the Bourbon-Hapsburg coat-of-arms on the cover and black block-like detailing on the spine. At this point in her life, the dejected queen and widow who was in serious danger of being guillotined herself found more need than ever for religion and, thus, the Bible.⁶⁰ The Bible's appearance in *Marie-Antoinette en Robe de Velours Bleu* is very likely explained as one of Marie-Antoinette's final statements to her faithful supporters that she was, in fact, the religious, faithful, and virtuous queen that they had always loved.⁶¹

In the end, we will never know exactly how the *Velours Bleu* portrait would have been received by the Salon or the greater public, or if the portrait could have fulfilled its goal of bettering Marie-Antoinette's public image. Baillio in his detailed provenance of the portrait explains that not long after Sombreuil commissioned this portrait from Vigée-Lebrun, the artist, being a renowned royalist, fled France for Italy in 1789 at the onset of the revolution.⁶² What happened to the *Velours Bleu* portrait after that is a little unclear in Baillio's account, but it would appear that the portrait was one of three variations of the same composition, one copy received by Sombreuil, a second left behind in the artist's studio (and presumably destroyed by revolutionaries), and a third retained by the

59. Fraser, *Marie-Antoinette*, 381.

60. Fraser, *Marie-Antoinette*, 392.

61. Just as Vigée-Lebrun's *Marie-Antoinette and Her Children*, *Marie-Antoinette en Robe de Velours Bleu* would probably also have been received with mixed reviews. Of course, the royalists would have welcomed the portrait as a virtuous representation of the queen they had supported for years. However, the Jacobins, the political party behind the revolution, were staunchly anti-Catholic and would have hated the queen even more for her allegorical assumption of the Virgin Mary; For further reading, see Mathiez, *French Revolution*, 117.

62. The commissioning of the *Velours Bleu* portrait was actually quite complicated. Sombreuil commissioned the portrait from Vigée-Lebrun by way of the Comte d'Angiviller, the king's Minister of Fine Arts. In the summer of 1788, Sombreuil asked d'Angiviller for a recent portrait of Marie-Antoinette, and then d'Angiviller presumably commissioned the portrait from the artist; Baillio, *Vigée-Lebrun*, 80.

artist and sold to Louis XVIII in 1818 after the monarchy was restored (the portrait in Fig. 1, which is still in the Louvre).⁶³ The one remaining comment on the portrait to be examined appears in the *History of the French Revolution*. Although it was written by the pro-revolutionist Jules Michelet in the mid-nineteenth century, this text is no less telling about how the portrait may have been received by the anti-monarchy critics of the 1780s:

From that time onward, [Marie-Antoinette] tried to ward off public hatred with a firm and scornful attitude...a pathetic attempt which did not improve her looks. In the formal portrait left to us of her in 1788 by her painter, Madame le Brun—who loved her and who must have adorned her with all her affection—one already feels something repulsive, disdainful, hardened.⁶⁴

Although she may not have succeeded in reversing the hostility of French society towards the queen, Vigée-Lebrun still successfully created a portrait that depicts Marie-Antoinette as a willing and humble subject of her king-husband by allegorizing her as the Virgin Mary with her many traditional attributes—classical architecture, the blue dress, white rose, and, of course, the book. The book, or more specifically the Bible, Marie-Antoinette holds is most significant in that it intrinsically ties the *Velours Bleu* portrait to the Education of the Virgin, creating a full-circle that revolves around one very specific point—that woman of the eighteenth century, whether the holy queen of heaven or the earthly queen of France, was expected to unwaveringly submit to masculine authority, just as Mary submitted to God's will. At once, Marie-Antoinette's assumption of the Virgin Mary in the *Velours Bleu* portrait produces the image of a woman who has stewarded well her education in domesticity, and has likewise become someone's dutiful and obliging wife.

63. Ibid., 78-80.

64. Ibid., 80.

CONCLUSION

From the Education of the Virgin scenes, to both allegorical and non-allegorical eighteenth-century portraits of women with books, and finally to Vigée-Lebrun's *Marie-Antoinette en Robe de Velours Bleu*, one conclusion is for sure—that images of women reading, at least up to the eighteenth century, are much less statements about the intellectual capacity or authority of the female sitters than they are blatant testimonies to man's (alleged) culturedness, intellect, and, above all, natural ability to rule in any arena, be it a household, a kingdom, or the world. The image of a woman with a book is a portrait of willing submission, of a sitter who is completely out of the control of her own destiny and ennobled only because of her association with her immediate patriarch. Despite the sitters' lived experiences—whether they surrendered to or defied their expected private, domestic roles—the portrait painters discussed in this thesis have successfully created a collective identity for their female sitters that expressly conveys the ideal of woman's subscription to the laws of a patriarchal society so palpable in the portraits' contemporary literature.

In Chapter One, we saw how scenes of the Education of the Virgin, particularly in seventeenth-century Spain, become, in a sense, some of the first “portraits” of woman's submission to man. Though at least one scholar has argued that the inclusion of the book with the mother and grandmother of Jesus supports women's literacy, once the facts are gathered—from the misogynistic literature of the time, to the subtle references to woman's domestic life in the images, and the typological nature of the text of the Bible which the Virgin often holds, one cannot ignore the possible conclusion that the Education of the Virgin is a scene that represents Mary as a willing participant in God's

plan of salvation—the vessel through which his Son entered the world, and thus ennobled for her obedience. It is no wonder that subsequent artists looked to the Education scene as a template for creating equally ennobled portraits of women of the allegorical genre.

In the same way that the Virgin was depicted as under the authority of God, female sitters of the eighteenth-century were portrayed with books as obedient and obliging wives to their husbands, even when the visual evidence was contradictory to the women's actual behavior as seen in Chapter Two. The two allegorical portraits, a print after Francois-Hubert Drouais's *Madame de Pompadour as a Vestal Virgin* and an anonymous artist's *Marquise du Châtelet as Urania*, and the two non-allegorical portraits, Vigée-Lebrun's *Comtesse de la Châtre* and Allan Ramsay's *Emily FitzGerald, Duchess of Leinster*, I discussed in Chapter Two all depict women with dubious reputations, but one would never know from viewing their portraits. By employing the book, an attribute intrinsically connected to men and the Virgin Mary, portraitists infused propriety and decorum into their sitters only through their associations with their husbands.

Finally, in Chapter Three, Vigée-Lebrun's *Marie-Antoinette en Robe de Velours Bleu* utilizes the allegorical figure of the Virgin Mary and her attributes to create the very portrait of wifely duty—submission to husband and his inherent masculine power. Just as the women in the portraits of Chapter Two, Marie-Antoinette was accused of the worst of all bad reputations, but in her majestic portrait, all we see is a woman within her proper domestic sphere, completely surrendered to the authority of her husband. Surrounded by attributes that double as symbols of her husband's royal family and the

Virgin Mary, Marie-Antoinette assumes the character of the Virgin Mary, and likewise the position of a virtuous and dutiful woman.

There is still much left to be said on the topic of portraits of women with books. My interpretation of the Education of the Virgin scenes, pendant portraits, and, finally, *Marie-Antoinette en Robe de Velours Bleu* as references to patriarchal authority is just one of many possible interpretations. Other avenues of exploration perhaps lie in devotional images of women with books that predate the seventeenth-century scenes of the Education of the Virgin as discussed in Chapter One; the significance of eighteenth-century allegorical portraits of men; and also Vigée-Lebrun's employment of the book in portraits of other aristocratic sitters, both male and female. However, with this thesis I hope to have at least reconciled the schism between an attribute that implies masculine authority (the book) and portraits of women reading that imply, rather, the *submission* to masculine authority, and established a viable visual predecessor for eighteenth-century portraits of women with books. With the intention of exploring the iconographical and social significance of Vigée-Lebrun's *Marie-Antoinette en Robe de Velours Bleu*, I have written a thesis that also contributes to the broader bodies of scholarship on the Education of the Virgin, eighteenth-century female portraiture, and Vigée-Lebrun as a portrait-painter of women.

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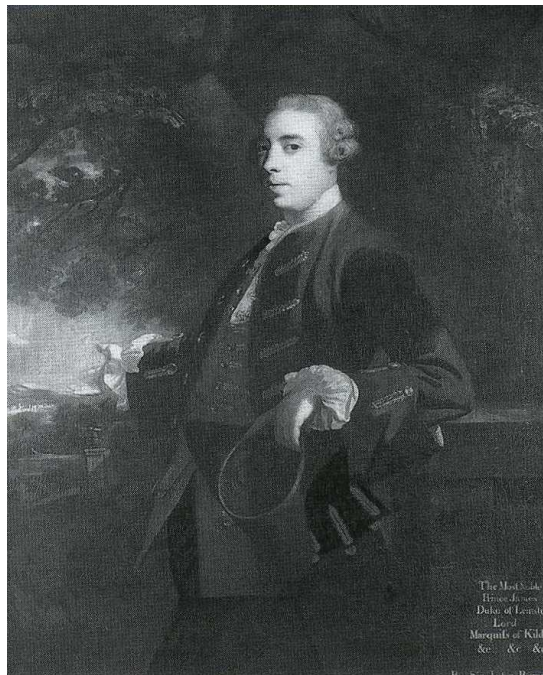


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